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THE GREEN KIDS

YOU'D READ ABOUT IT IN BOOKS. YOU'D EXPECTED IT. WAR MEANT DEATH. BUT THAT WASN'T THE WAY YOU SAW IT BACK IN JUNE, 1918. YOU WERE MAJOR JOSEPH CASWELL THEN. YOU WERE FLIGHT LEADER OF THE 87TH AERO, AMERICAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCES. YOU WERE AN EXPERIENCED COMBAT PILOT. YOU KNEW THE SCORE. BUT EVERY DAY YOU'D TAKE UP THOSE KIDS... THOSE KIDS STILL WET BEHIND THEIR EARS... THOSE KIDS WITH DEW STILL IN THEIR EYES... THOSE KIDS WITH ONLY FIVE HOURS SOLO... THOSE GREEN KIDS!



GEORGE EVANS - 55

EVERY DAY, YOU'D WATCH THEIR SPADS SHUDDER UNDER FOKKER CROSSFIRE, AND PLUMMET EARTHWARD. AND AS YOU'D EVEN THE SCORE, YOU'D SHAKE YOUR HEAD...

FIRST MCCALL! N-NOW BANTON! I...I'M SICK! WHAT'S THE GOOD OF SENDING THEM UP? THEIR BOOTS ARE STILL CAKED WITH THE MUD OF KELLY FIELD! FIVE HOURS SOLO... AND THEY PIN WINGS ON THEIR CHESTS!



EVERY DAY, YOU'D TAKE YOUR TOLL OF BOCHE PLANES, YES! BUT YOUR HEART WOULD GO OUT TO THOSE GREEN KIDS...

THE ONLY WINGS THEY WIND UP WITH ARE THE ONES VON WESTAU'S FLYING CIRCUS PAINTS ON ITS SCOREBOARD! THEY DON'T TURN OUT PILOTS FROM ISSOUDON AND KELLY. THEY TURN OUT PROSPECTIVE GERMAN VICTORIES!



AND EVERY DAY, AFTER THE DAWN PATROL, YOU'D REPORT TO THE SQUADRON C.O., LIEUTENANT COLONEL JACK ROSS...

WELL, BUTCHER! YOU DID IT AGAIN! SAME AS YESTERDAY! LOST THREE! CORRECTION! MURDERED THREE!

SPARE ME THE USUAL DRAMATICS, CASWELL! WHO WENT DOWN?



WHO USUALLY GOES DOWN? THE GREEN KIDS! THE PLEDGIES IN THE HUN VICTORY FRATERNITY! BANTON! MCCALL! O'HARA! YOU COULD HAVE CHALKED THEIR NAMES OFF BEFORE THEY WENT UP!

VERY WELL! WE'LL REPLACE THEM BY TOMORROW!



REPLACE THEM WITH WHAT?? WITH KIDS WHO DON'T KNOW A STICK FROM A STRUT?? WITH KIDS WHO DON'T KNOW ANYTHING EXCEPT HOW TO GET THEMSELVES SHOT DOWN!?

I'M AWARE OF YOUR ATTITUDE, CASWELL! THAT'LL BE ALL!



THAT'S NOT ALL! YOU DON'T HAVE TO WATCH THEM PULL BONER AFTER BONER! THINGS ANY EXPERIENCED PILOT KNOWS IS SHEER SUICIDE!

YOU'RE WASTING YOUR BREATH, CASWELL! I SAID THAT'LL BE ALL!



AND I SAID THAT'S NOT ALL! GO AHEAD! BUST ME FOR ALL I CARE! I'D WELCOME IT! I'D WELCOME ANYTHING SO'S NOT TO HAVE TO PLAY UNDERTAKER TO A PACK OF GREEN KIDS!

YOU'LL GET YOUR REPLACEMENTS IN THE MORNING! DISMISSED CASWELL!



WHAT ARE YOU MADE OF, ANYWAY, ROSS? GRANITE ON THE OUTSIDE? ICE WATER ON THE INSIDE? DON'T YOU CARE ABOUT THE GREEN KIDS YOU SEND ME? DON'T THOSE NAMES YOU CROSS OUT DISTURB YOUR SLEEP?

YOU'RE DIS-MISSED, CASWELL!

NO CONSCIENCE, EH, ROSS? BANTON, O'HARA, McCALL... THEY'RE JUST STATISTICS, EH? PICK UP THE PHONE AND ORDER THREE MORE DUCKS TO SEND UP FOR VON WESTAU'S BOYS TO HUNT TOMORROW!

I SAID YOU'RE DIS-MISSED, CASWELL! GET OUT!

AND EVERY DAY, YOU'D GET OUT? YOU'D SLAM OUT OF THE C.O.'S OFFICE, MUTTERING, AND YOU'D HEAR HIM ON THE PHONE...

YES, COLONEL?

ORDER THREE REPLACEMENTS FROM HEADQUARTERS AT AIX-LE-MANS! AND TELL THE OFFICERS' MESS TO SET THREE PLATES LESS...

AND EVERY EVENING, IN THE DINING ROOM, YOU'D STARE AT THOSE EMPTY SEATS, AND YOU'D PUSH AWAY YOUR FOOD, AND YOU'D WATCH ROSS AND WONDER HOW HE DID IT...

NO MATTER, CAS? YOU'RE NOT EATING! STOMACH TROUBLE?

YEAH! A BELLY-FULL! I KEEP SEEING EMPTY SEATS! I'M ALWAYS SEEING EMPTY SEATS! DON'T YOU EVER SEE EMPTY SEATS, COLONEL?

I SEE THEM, CASWELL!

YOU DON'T EAT AS IF YOU SEE THEM, COLONEL! YOU SEEM TO HAVE AN APPETITE! I COULD NEVER UNDERSTAND HOW A BUTCHER COULD SIT DOWN AT A TABLE AFTER A DAY OF...

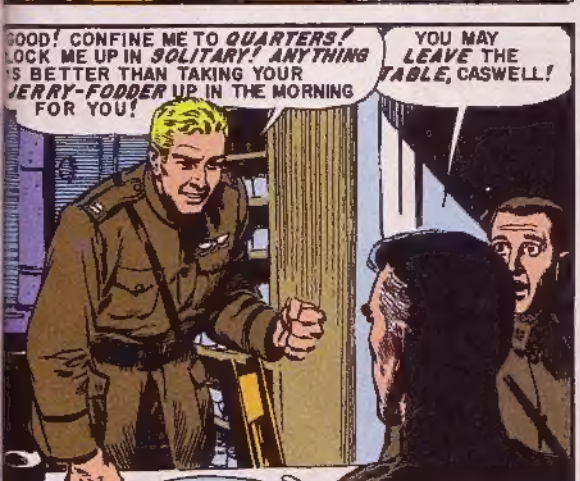
YOU'RE BECOMING ABUSIVE, CASWELL!

GOOD! CONFINE ME TO QUARTERS! LOCK ME UP IN SOLITARY! ANYTHING'S BETTER THAN TAKING YOUR JERRY-FODDER UP IN THE MORNING FOR YOU!

YOU MAY LEAVE THE TABLE, CASWELL!

THANKS, COLONEL! AND ENJOY YOUR MEAL! DIGEST IT! SLEEP ON IT! DON'T LET IT BOTHER YOU THAT THE GREEN KIDS WHO EAT BREAKFAST WITH YOU EVERY MORNING NEVER SHOW UP FOR SUPPER...

JUST BE ON THE TARMAC AT FIVE, CASWELL! THAT'S AN ORDER!



BUT EVERY MORNING AT FIVE, YOU'D BE THERE... ON THE TARMAC... AND YOU'D GO THROUGH THE SAME ACT AGAIN... GREETING THOSE KIDS... THOSE GREEN KIDS...

BUT THAT MORNING... THAT ONE MORNING... IT WAS DIFFERENT...

LIEUTENANTS GOODSON, BRYANT AND DEVITO REPORTING, SIR! ANY LAST MINUTE INSTRUCTIONS?

INSTRUCTIONS?! COULD YOU FOLLOW THEM? WHAT DID YOU HAVE? FIVE HOURS SOLO?

YES, SIR...



LOOK! STICK CLOSE TO ME AND DO NOTHING! MAYBE YOU'LL HAVE SUPPER HERE AS WELL AS BREAKFAST!

B-BUT, SIR! WE'RE TRAINED PILOTS! WE CAME HERE EXPECTING ACTION!



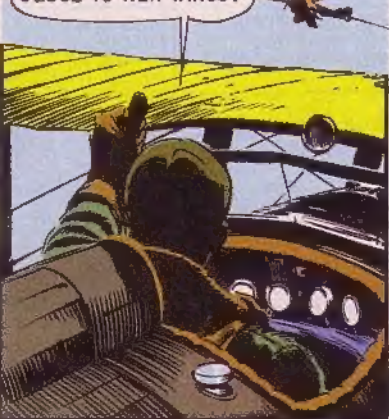
ACTION!? AFTER FIVE HOURS SOLO!? YOU DUMB SQUIRTS! YOU STICK CLOSE TO ME AND DO NOTHING OR I'LL HAVE YOU COURT-MARTIALED WHEN WE GET BACK! UNDERSTAND!?!?

Y-YES, SIR...



YES! THAT MORNING WAS DIFFERENT... DIFFERENT IN A LOT OF WAYS...

HERE COMES A JERRY! HE'S EYING ME! THE FOX KNOWS THE MOTHER HEN KEEPS THE CHICKS CLOSE TO HER WINGS!



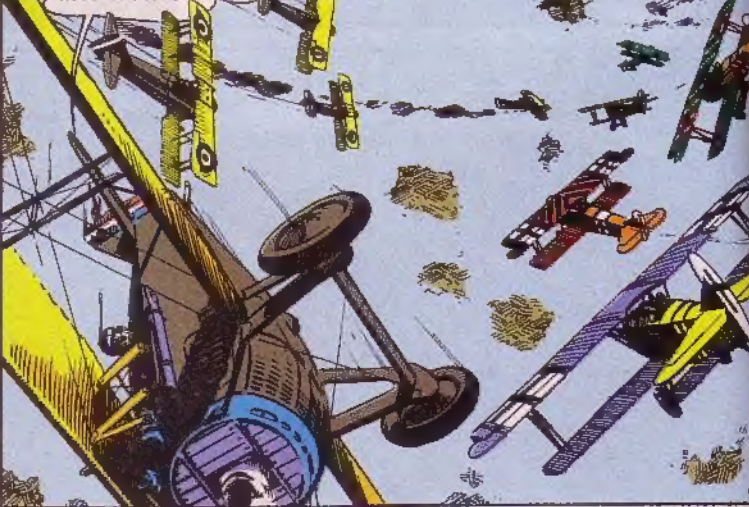
BLAST 'IM! HE'S PRYING ME LOOSE FROM THE KIDS! I... I HOPE THOSE NITWITS HAVE ENOUGH SENSE TO FOLLOW ME!



THE FOOLS! THE CRAZY FOOLS! THEY'RE CHARGING THE KRAUT! THEY'RE...

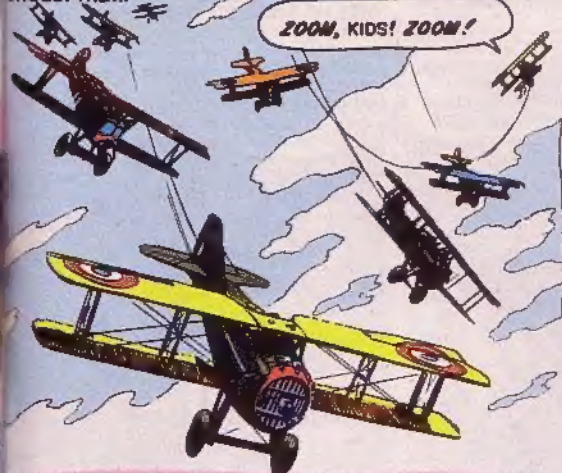


THEY'RE BEING SUCKED INTO A TRAP!



THEY CAME OUT OF THE SUN, THEN. THE REST OF VON WESTAU'S CIRCUS. THEY CAME DOWN WITH SPANDAU GUNS BLAZING, TRAPPING THE KIDS IN THEIR WICKED CROSSFIRE...

ZOOM, KIDS! ZOOM!



YOU PICKED OFF THE FOKKER ON BRYANT'S TAIL AND LOOKED AROUND. DEVITO'S SPAD WAS SCREAMING EARTHWARD. GOODSON WAS DESPERATELY TRYING TO SHAKE TWO JERRYS...

DEVITO'S GONE, BUT YOU KRAUTS'LL GET THE OTHER TWO KIDS OVER MY DEAD BODY!
**HOLD ON, GOODSON!
I'M COMING!**



WE WOULDN'T HAVE INEXPERIENCED PILOTS IF THESE KIDS CAME TO US PROPERLY TRAINED... WITH 30 INSTEAD OF 5 HOURS SOLO! YOU DON'T SEE SO MANY CASUALTIES AMONG OUR OLD HANDS...

KEEP PROTECTING BRYANT AND GOODSON AND THEY'LL BECOME OLD HANDS!



BUT YOU SAW THEM COMING AND YOU CLIMBED AND BANKED SHARPLY...

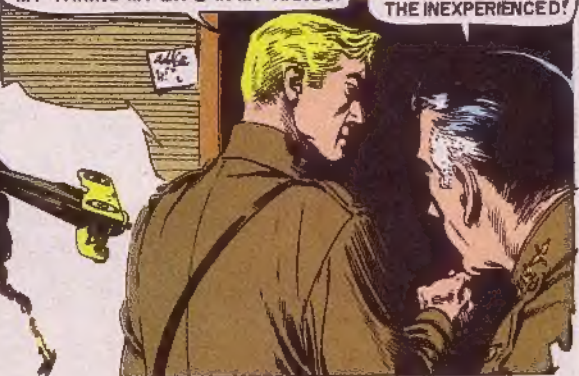
BRYANT'S IN THE WORST TROUBLE! I'LL TAKE CARE OF HIM!



LATER, IN COLONEL ROSS'S SHACK, YOU SCRATCHED DEVITO'S NAME, SNARLING...

WE'RE IMPROVING! ONLY ONE LOSS TODAY! BRYANT AND GOODSON ARE ALIVE THANKS TO MY TAKING MY LIFE IN MY HANDS!

DON'T BE SO PROUD, CASWELL! THE EXPERIENCED SHOULD PROTECT THE INEXPERIENCED!



YOU CAN SAY THAT! YOU SIT HERE SHUFFLING PAPERS AND SIGNING ORDERS! I'D LIKE TO SEE YOU TAKE THOSE KIDS UP AND TRY TO PROTECT THEM!

I SERVED MY TIME IN THE AIR, CASWELL!

WELL, WHY DON'T YOU DO SOMETHING? REVOLT! SEND THEM BACK! RAISE A SCANDAL!

MAYBE YOU CAN, CASWELL! YOU'RE THE 87TH'S NEW C.O.!



YES! THAT MORNING WAS DIFFERENT. YOU JUST STOOD THERE... SPEECHLESS...

SO LET'S SEE HOW *YOU* HANDLE THE PROBLEM! I'VE BEEN ORDERED TO A.E.F. HEADQUARTERS IN *PARIS!* THE 87TH IS *YOURS* NOW! THAT'S *RIGHT!* READ THIS...



THE COMMUNIQUE WAS PRECISE. IT WAS ALL TRUE. ROSS HAD BEEN RELIEVED. YOU WERE SQUADRON COMMANDER NOW...

CASWELL! YOU'VE INSULTED ME AND CURSED ME SINCE THE DAY YOU JOINED THE 87TH. I NEVER PENALIZED YOU BECAUSE I FELT SOMEDAY *YOUR* TURN WOULD COME! WELL, *PUNISHMENT TIME IS HERE!*



ROSS GATHERED HIS COAT AND CAP AND STRODE OUT OF THE C.O.'S SHACK. AS THE MOTORCYCLE GUNNED OFF, HE SHOUTED BACK FROM THE SIDECAR...

AND I HOPE *YOU* HAVE A FLIGHT LEADER ON *YOUR* NECK 24 HOURS A DAY LIKE *YOU* WERE ON *MINE!*

IF YOU THINK I'M GOING TO BE LIKE *YOU* WERE, *GUESS AGAIN, ROSS!*



YOU WATCHED THE CYCLE CLOUD OFF AND THEN YOU STAMPED INSIDE AND PUT A CALL THROUGH TO HEAD-QUARTERS AT AIX-LE-MAINS...DIRECT TO THE REPLACEMENT CENTER'S C.O., COLONEL WINTERS...

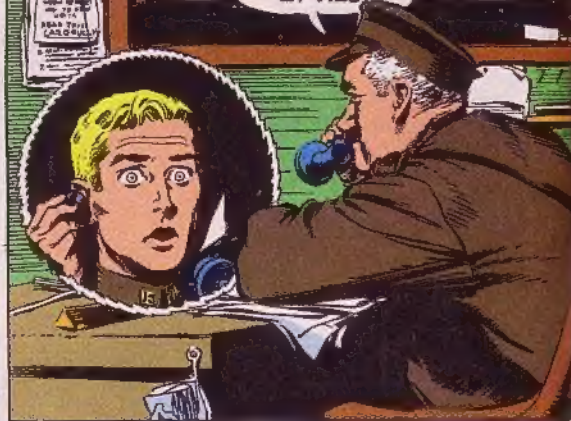
COLONEL WINTERS? THIS IS MAJOR JOE CASWELL...THE 87TH'S NEW C.O. I'M CALLING FOR *TWO REPLACEMENTS!* AND IF YOU'RE GOING TO SEND ANY MORE *FIVE HOUR SOLO KIDS... DON'T! I WON'T FLY THEM!*

YOU'RE BEGINNING TO SOUND LIKE ROSS!



ROSS!?

THAT'S *RIGHT!* ROSS TRIED TO MOVE HEAVEN AND EARTH TO PREVENT GREEN PILOTS FROM BEING SENT UP! HE FOUGHT IT DOWN THE LINE FROM *PARIS* TO *WASHINGTON!* HE GOT NOWHERE! NEITHER WILL *YOU!* SO SAVE *YOUR* BREATH AND *MY* TIME!



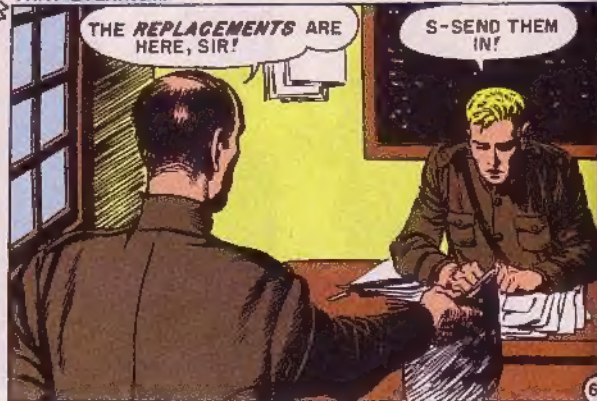
ROSS... TRIED...? HE WENT *CRAZY* TRYING! SO KNOCK IT OFF, CASWELL! WE'RE DOING OUR JOB AS BEST WE CAN HERE! SO YOU DO *YOURS* THERE!



YES, THAT MORNING WAS DIFFERENT. VERY DIFFERENT. AND THAT EVENING...

THE *REPLACEMENTS* ARE HERE, SIR!

S-SEND THEM IN!



THAT EVENING, YOU KNEW WHAT ROSS WENT THROUGH EVERY DAY... WHEN THOSE KIDS CAME IN... THOSE KIDS STILL WET BEHIND THE EARS... THOSE GREEN KIDS...

FIVE HOURS SOLO?

THAT'S RIGHT, SIR! THAT'S ALL ANY OF US GET! EVERYBODY KNOWS WE'RE NEEDED IN A HURRY! WHEN DO WE FLY, SIR?



T-TOMORROW! CAPTAIN VICKS WILL TAKE YOU UP ON THE MORNING PATROL! SEE YOU AT BREAKFAST...

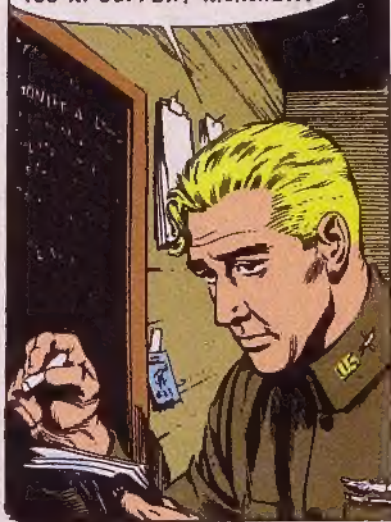
YES, SIR!

THANK YOU, SIR!



YES, THAT EVENING YOU KNEW WHAT ROSS MUST HAVE REALLY FELT LIKE...

...BUT... BUT WILL I SEE YOU AT SUPPER? ...CHOKE...



BUT IT WASN'T UNTIL SEVERAL WEEKS LATER THAT YOU LEARNED SOMETHING ELSE. ONE AFTERNOON, THE DOOR TO YOUR SHACK OPENED...

HOW ARE YOU, YOUR OLD BUTCHER?

ROSS! J-JACK! I...I... I'M... GLAD TO SEE YOU, JACK! SIT DOWN...



HOW'S VICKS BEEN TREATING YOU, CASWELL? TURNING INTO A CONSCIENCE FOR YOU LIKE YOU WERE FOR ME?

WORSE! HE WON'T LET UP! I...I LEARNED A GREAT DEAL WHEN I STEPPED INTO YOUR SHOES, JACK! AND VICKS WILL GET HIS CHANCE!



THOUGHT I'D STOP BY TO SHOW YOU SOMETHING, JOE! SOME JERRY PILOTS THE FRENCH BOYS CAPTURED OVER NEAR THE MARNE. THEY'RE FROM VON WESTAU'S CIRCUS!

GOOD...GOOD HEAVENS, JACK! THEY...THEY'RE KIDS!



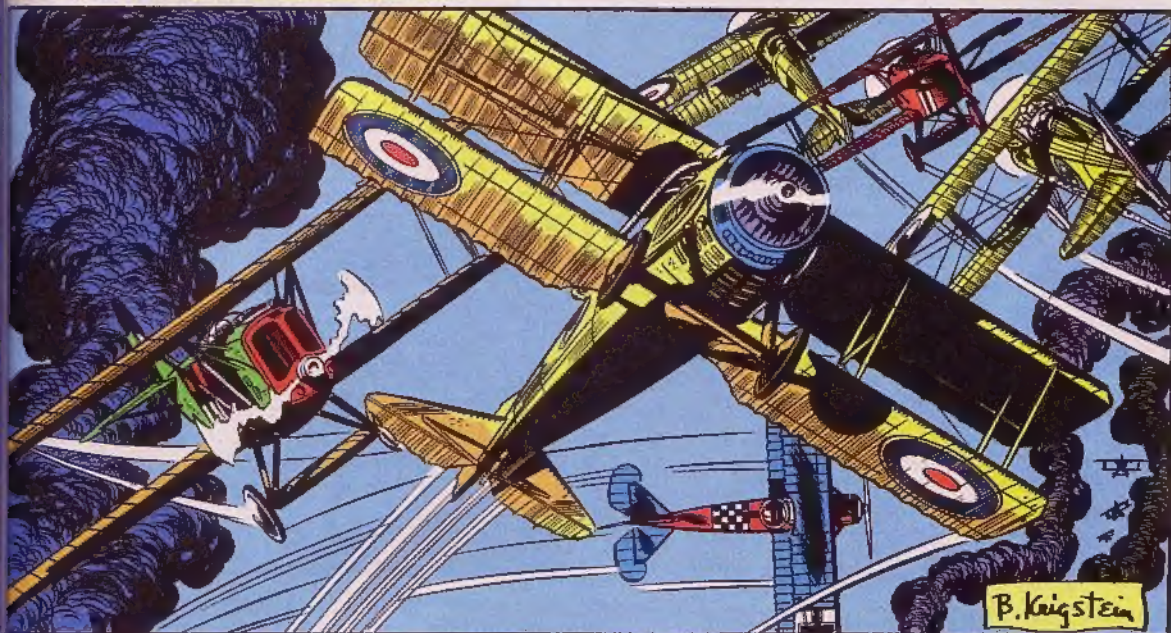
THAT'S RIGHT! GREEN KIDS! THEY EACH HAD THREE HOURS SOLO WHEN THEY CAME UP! IF YOU THINK YOU'VE GOT TROUBLES, CAN YOU IMAGINE WHAT VON WESTAU GOES THROUGH?



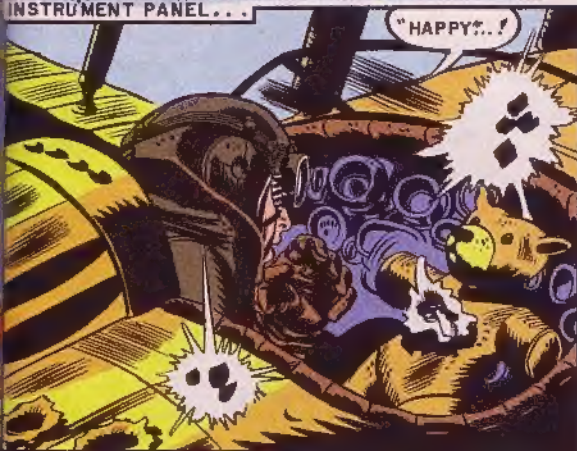
THE END...

THE GOOD LUCK PIECE

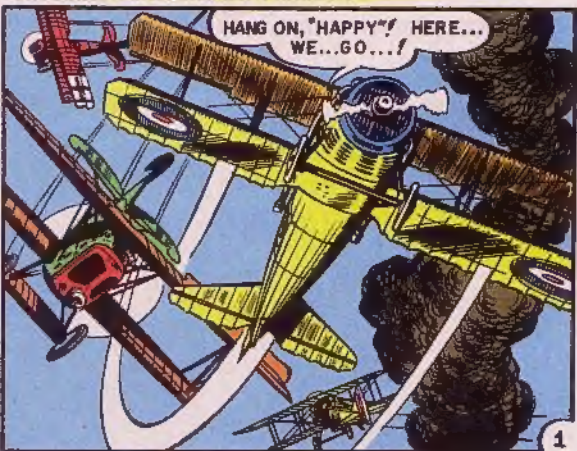
JUNE, 1918: THE SKY OVER NO-MAN'S-LAND WAS BOILING THAT AFTERNOON... A SEETHING CAULDRON OF ROARING SPADS AND THUNDERING FOKKERS... OF WHINING STEEL AND THE SHARP STACCATO OF MACHINE GUNS. NOW AND THEN, A HEAVY BLAST WOULD REND THE AIR AND A GREAT PUFF OF SMOKE WOULD RISE... A BLACK CLOUD AGAINST THE CLEAR BLUE SKY... AS SOME LINEN-CLAD SHIP WOULD EXPLODE INTO A MILLION FIERY FRAGMENTS. SUDDENLY, OUT OF THE DOG FIGHT, A SPAD ZOOMED WILDLY. AND ON ITS TAIL, A FOKKER SCREAMED, ITS SPANDAU GUNS CHATTERING. HOT METAL TORE INTO BUDDY WILSON'S WRITHING PLANE...



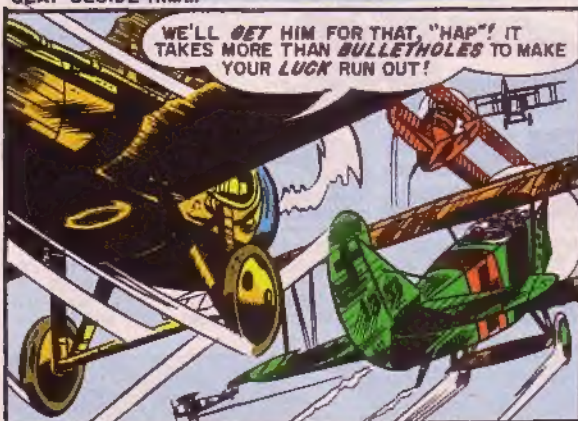
...SLUGS SANG PAST THE AMERICAN LIEUTENANT'S EAR. SOME CHOKED INTO THE S.XIII'S WOODEN FRAME. THE LITTLE FUZZY FORM, SQUEEZED INTO THE SEAT BESIDE WILSON, LEAPED LIKE A LIVING THING... AGAINST THE INSTRUMENT PANEL...



BUDDY REACHED OUT AND SNATCHED THE STUFFED TEDDY BEAR... HIS GOOD LUCK PIECE. HE SAW THAT IT HAD BEEN RIPPED OPEN BY BOGE BULLETS. WILSON'S EYES CLOUDED... CLOUDED WITH RAGE...



BUDDY STICKED BACK OUT OF HIS ZOOM. HE CLIMBED INTO A TIGHT LOOP AND CAME DOWN BEHIND THE STARTLED JERRY, WHO, A MOMENT BEFORE, HAD BEEN THE DEADLY HUNTER. NOW, SUDDENLY, HE WAS THE HUNTED! BUDDY PATTED THE WOUNDED TOY WHICH WAS AGAIN ON THE SEAT BESIDE HIM...



THE D.VII FOKKER NOSED OVER SUDDENLY, ITS STRUT-WIRES WHINING, LEAVING A WAKE OF SCARLET FLAME. BUDDY FOLLOWED IT DOWN TO MAKE SURE. THEN HE CLIMBED TO REJOIN THE FRAY. BUT THE BOCHE HAD VANISHED FROM THE SKY BY THEN, AND HIS COMRADES WERE WINGING THEIR WAY HOME...



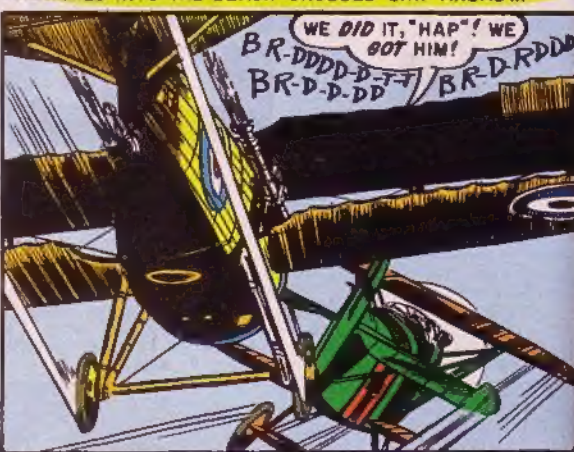
BUDDY LOOKED AT HIS FLUFFY BROWN CHARM, NOW LOSING ITS STUFFING IN THE WIND. HE LOOKED AT THE LONG RIP THROUGH IT MADE BY A BOCHE SPANDAU SLUG, AND A FLOOD OF MEMORIES CROWDED INTO BUDDY'S MIND...



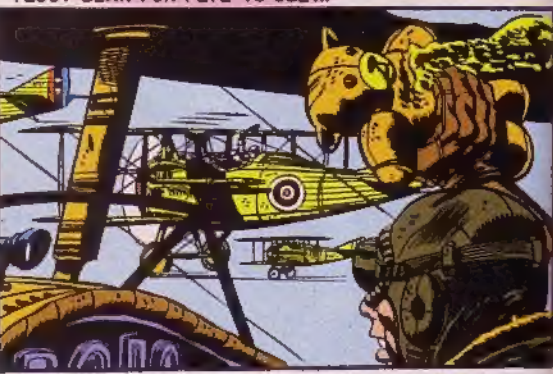
BUDDY REMEMBERED HOW "HAPPY" CAME TO FRANCE...HOW HIS MOTHER HAD BROUGHT THE STUFFED BEAR TO THE TRAINING FIELD OUTSIDE PARIS... ALL THE WAY FROM PHILADELPHIA...



THE YOUNG AMERICAN LIEUTENANT CAUGHT THE FOKKER IN HIS SIGHTS. HE SQUEEZED THE TRIPS. THE TWIN VICKERS BARKED, AND AN INCENDIARY STREAM OF STEEL VANISHED INTO THE BLACK-CROSSED SHIP AHEAD...

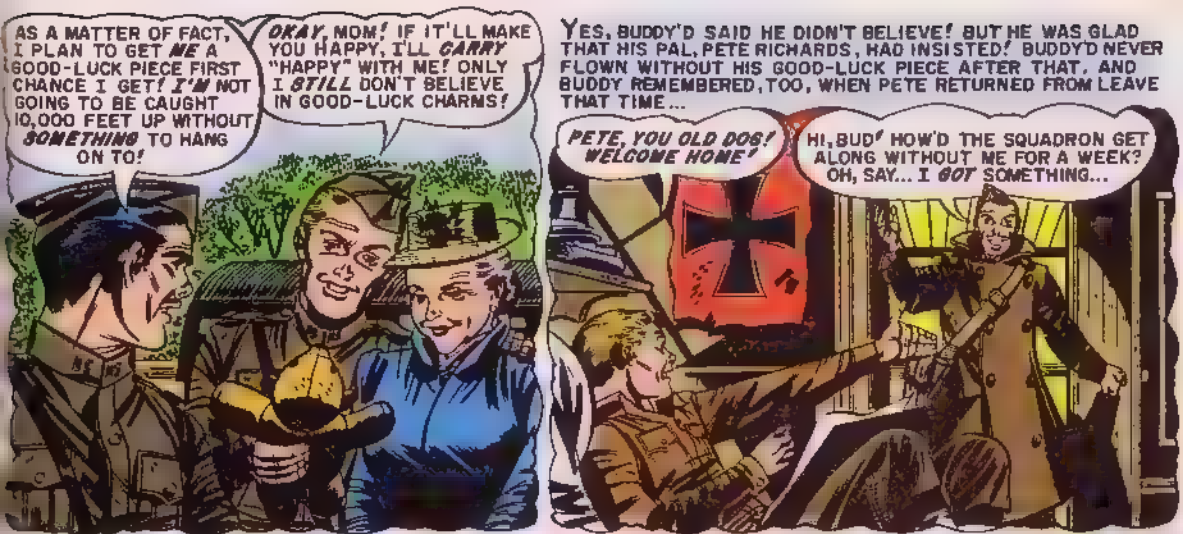


HE REVVED UP HIS HISPANO-SUIZA ENGINE AND CLOSED THE DISTANCE BETWEEN HIS S.XIII AND THE REST OF THE SQUADRON. AND THERE WAS PETE...GRINNING AND WAVING HIS GOOD LUCK PIECE...THE BLUE SATIN GARTER WITH THE PINK ROSE ON IT. BUDDY HELD UP HIS RIPPED TEDDY BEAR FOR PETE TO SEE...



PETE HAD BEEN THERE AT THE TIME, AND BUDDY'D BEEN EMBARRASSED...





AS A MATTER OF FACT, I PLAN TO GET **ME** A GOOD-**LUCK** PIECE FIRST CHANCE I GET! I'M NOT GOING TO BE CAUGHT 10,000 FEET UP WITHOUT **SOMETHING** TO HANG ON TO!

OKAY, MOM! IF IT'LL MAKE YOU HAPPY, I'LL **CARRY** "HAPPY" WITH ME! ONLY I **STILL** DON'T BELIEVE IN GOOD-**LUCK** CHARMS!

YES, BUDDY'D SAID HE DIDN'T BELIEVE! BUT HE WAS GLAD THAT HIS PAL, PETE RICHARDS, HAD INSISTED! BUDDY'D NEVER FLOWN WITHOUT HIS GOOD-**LUCK** PIECE AFTER THAT, AND BUDDY REMEMBERED, TOO, WHEN PETE RETURNED FROM LEAVE THAT TIME...

PETE, YOU OLD DOG! WELCOME HOME!

HI, BUD! HOW'D THE SQUADRON GET ALONG WITHOUT ME FOR A WEEK? OH, SAY... I GOT SOMETHING...

PETE HAD BEEN EXCITED AND PLEASED ABOUT SOMETHING. HE'D DUG DEEP INTO HIS UNIFORM POCKET AND DRAWN FORTH THE OBJECT...

HUH? I DON'T SEE ANYTHING! JUST SOME FANCY BLUE SATIN WITH A PINK ROSEBUD! LOOKS LIKE A **GARTER**!

IT IS A GARTER! A SOUVENIR OF A NIGHT IN GAY PAREE. MON DOO, AS THE FRENCH SAY! DON'T YOU RECOGNIZE A **FIRST-CLASS GOOD-**LUCK** PIECE** WHEN YOU SEE ONE'?

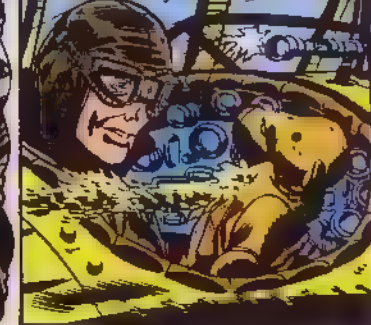
AND THE MEMORIES FILLED BUDDY WILSON WITH A WARMTH... AN AFFECTION KNOWN ONLY TO MEN WHO LIVE AND FIGHT AND MAYBE DIE TOGETHER...

ME AND YOU, "HAP"... AND PETE AND HIS FANCY **GARTER**! WE'LL COME OUT OF THIS WHOLE THING AS LONG AS WE STICK TOGETHER! **WON'T WE?**

THERE WAS HOT COFFEE AND SINKERS WAITING AT THE CANTEEN WHEN THE SQUADRON LANDED... AND THAT PRETTY RED CROSS VOLUNTEER...

YEAH, I COULD EAT SOMETHING... BUT "HAPPY" HERE COULDN'T **HOLD** MUCH RIGHT NOW! IT WAS A **GLOBE ONE**! A FEW INCHES OVER AND I'D LOOK LIKE THAT!

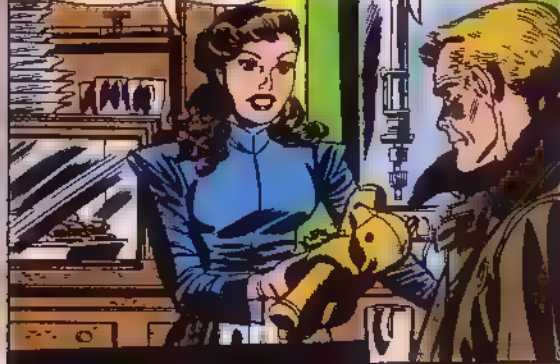
WHY THE **POOR** THING! WOULD YOU LIKE ME TO **SEW** HIM UP?



BUDDY ACCEPTED HER OFFER WITH THANKS, AND SHE TOOK THE TORN STUFFED BEAR FROM HIM, CHIDING...

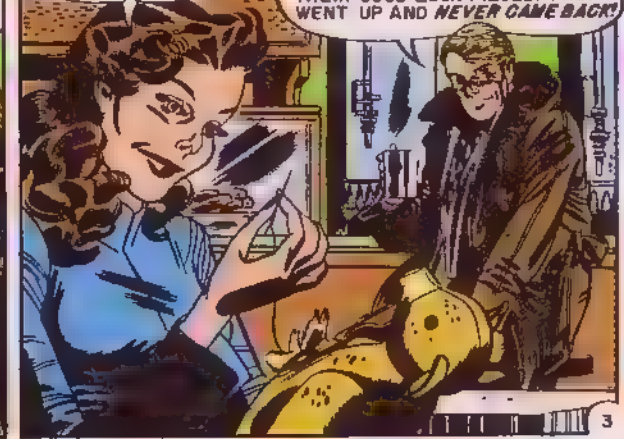
ANYWAY, I THINK IT WAS **CRUEL** TO TAKE THE POOR DEFENSELESS THING INTO COMBAT WITH YOU!

YOU COULDN'T GET ME UP THERE **WITHOUT** HIM! HE'S MY **GOOD-**LUCK** CHARM**!



SURELY, YOU'RE **JOKING**? YOU CAN'T REALLY BELIEVE...

WELL, NO! I REALLY **DON'T** BELIEVE! BUT JUST THE SAME, I'VE SEEN MEN WHO **FORGOT** THEIR GOOD **LUCK** PIECES! THEY WENT UP AND **NEVER** CAME BACK!



THE RED CROSS GIRL STOPPED SEWING! SHE LOOKED AT BUDDY WITH A TOLERANT SMILE, AS IF HE WERE AN ERRING CHILD...

BUT IT'S WAR, LIEUTENANT! THERE ARE BULLETS... AND THE ENEMY! SOMEONE IS BOUND TO BE KILLED! IF EVERYONE CARRIED A GOOD-LUCK CHARM, EVERYONE WOULD BE SAFE, ACCORDING TO YOUR VIEWS...

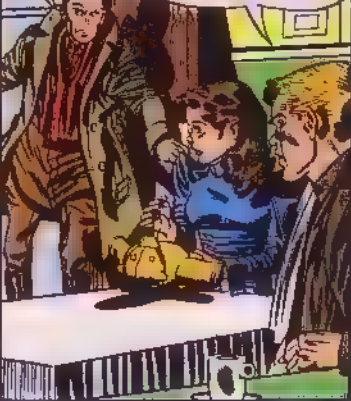
THEY'RE NOT MY VIEWS, MA'AM! I... I TAKE "HAP" WITH ME 'CAUSE... AH... 'CAUSE... EVERYONE TAKES SOMETHING! DON'T YOU SEE...?



BUDDY WAS SAVED FROM THE EMBARRASSMENT OF FURTHER EXPLANATION BY THE SUDDEN HURRIED ENTRANCE INTO THE CANTEEN OF A SQUADRON MATE...

COME ON, BUD! WE'RE GOING UP AGAIN!

WHAT!? BUT... WE JUST CAME DOWN! WHY CAN'T SOME OF THE OTHERS GO? THE ONES THAT.



COMMUNICATIONS GOT A MESSAGE FROM A FRENCH O.P.' A FLIGHT OF D. VII'S IS HEADED THIS WAY. THEY FIGURE THEY'LL STRAFE OUR PLANES ON THE GROUND! THE C.O. SAYS EVERYBODY GOES UP! C'MON!

BUT, I CAN'T GO, FRANK...



BUDDY LOOKED AT HIS HALF-SEWN TEDDY BEAR. THEN HE LOOKED AT THE PRETTY RED CROSS GIRL. SHE WAS SMILING AT HIM. HE FLUSHED WITH SHAME...

YOU GO AHEAD, LIEUTENANT! I'LL HAVE YOUR... ER... GOOD-LUCK CHARM LOOKING GOOD AS NEW WHEN YOU GET BACK!

UH... SURE! THANKS!

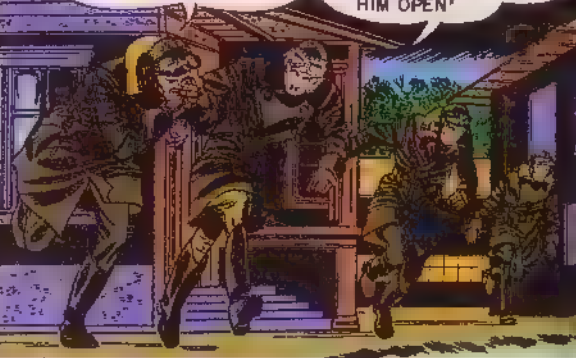
YOU'VE GOT FIVE MINUTES TO GET IN THE AIR, BUD!



BUDDY WAS ON HIS WAY FROM THE CANTEEN WHEN HE MET PETE. PETE LOOKED AROUND AS IF THERE WAS SOMETHING MISSING...

NO REST FOR THE WEARY, EH, BUDDY? SAY! WHERE'S "HAPPY"?

IN THERE... GETTING HIS INSIDES SEWN BACK UP! SOME CLOWN BOCHE RIPPED HIM OPEN!



MAYBE YOU HAVEN'T HEARD!? WE'RE GOIN' UP AGAIN! YOU CAN'T GO UP WITHOUT "HAPPY"!

SURE I CAN, PETE! YOU KNOW I DON'T BELIEVE IN THAT SUPERSTITIOUS HOGWASH!

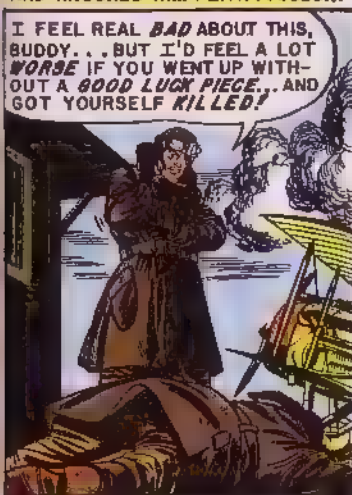


LOOK, PAL! MAYBE YOU'RE NOT SUPERSTITIOUS... BUT I AM! AND I LIKE HAVING YOU AROUND... FOR LAUGHS! GO GET THAT TEDDY BEAR! YOU'RE NOT GOING TO MEET JERRY WITHOUT SOMETHING FOR LUCK!

DON'T BE SILLY, PETE! I'M NOT GOING BACK FOR "HAPPY"... AND I AM GOING UP! SO... OUT OF THE WAY...



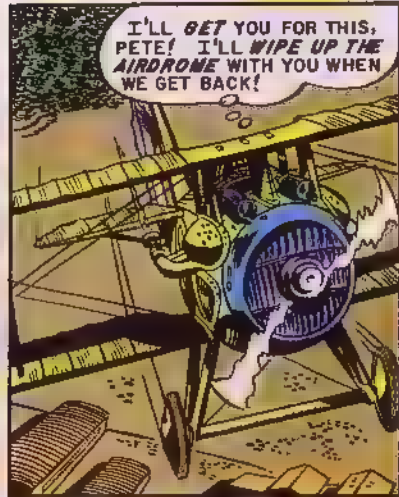
BUDDY NEVER KNEW WHAT HIT HIM. PETE THREW THE SHORT JOLTING RIGHT TO BUDDY'S JAW AND KNOCKED HIM FLAT...COLD...



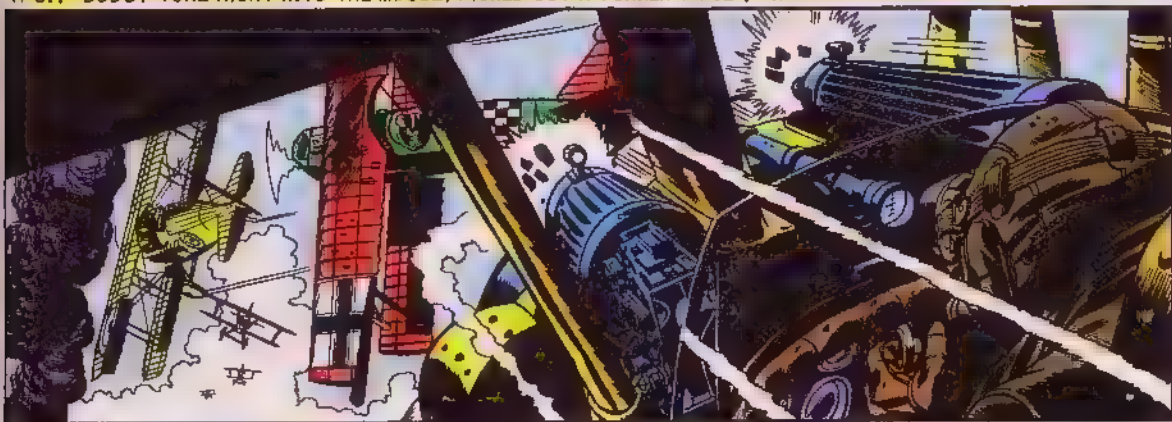
BUDDY CAME TO AS THE SPADS ROARED DOWN THE TARMAC AND INTO THE AIR. HE SHOOK HIS HEAD AND STUMBLED TO HIS FEET...



A MINUTE LATER, PETE WAS UPSTAIRS, TRYING TO CATCH UP WITH THE INTERCEPTOR SQUADRON...



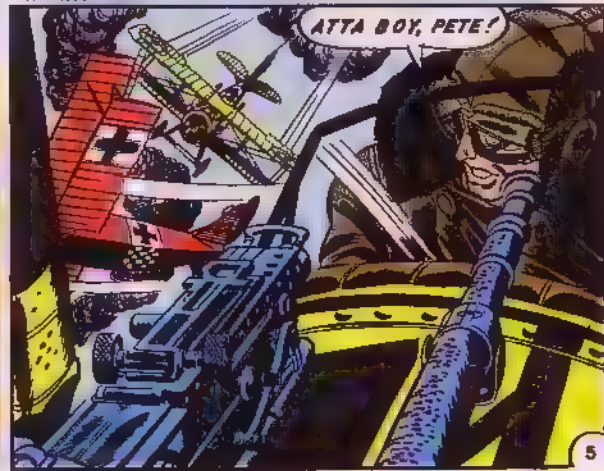
BUDDY WAS HALF A MILE AWAY WHEN THE SQUADRON MET THE ONCOMING HUN CIRCUS. THERE WAS NO JOCKEYING FOR POSITION OR FEELING OUT THE OPPONENT. THERE WAS NO TIME. BOTH FLIGHTS JUST MELTED TOGETHER, MIXING IT UP. BUDDY TORE RIGHT INTO THE MELEE, PICKED OUT A FOKKER TARGET, AND BLAZED AWAY...



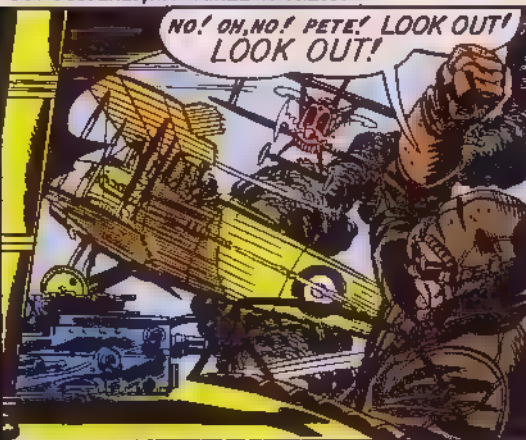
ONE MOMENT THE D.XII WAS THERE... THEN THERE WAS AN EXPLOSION... AND THE NEXT MOMENT THE SKY WAS CLEAR IN FRONT OF HIM. SUDDENLY, HOT STEEL RIPPED INTO BUD'S INSTRUMENT PANEL. A FOKKER WAS ON HIS TAIL. HE SHOVELED THE STICK FORWARD...



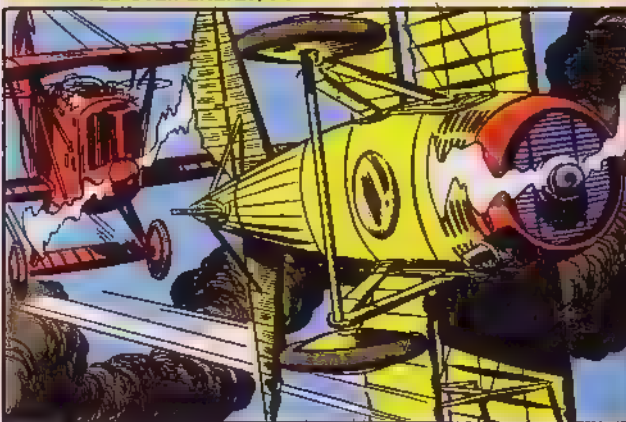
...AND WENT INTO A DIVE, WAITING. BUT NO MORE SLUGS FLEW. BUDDY LOOKED BACK. PETE...GOOD OLD PETE WAS TAKING CARE OF THE JERRY...



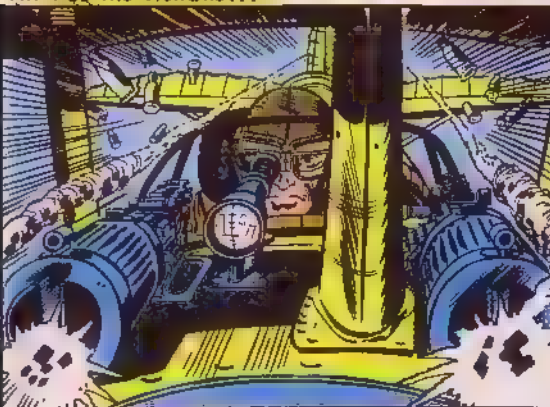
THE FOKKER FELL AWAY, SPITTING BLACK SMOKE. BUDDY SMILED AND WAVED TO HIS SQUADRON MATE. BUT SUDDENLY, HIS SMILE FROZE...



BUDDY POINTED FRANTICALLY. BUT IT WAS TOO LATE. THE D.XII SCREAMED DOWN AT PETE'S SPAD, SPANDAU'S OPEN ALL THE WAY. BUDDY SAW PETE HALF RISE IN HIS SEAT... SAW THE SPAD ROLL OVER LAZILY...



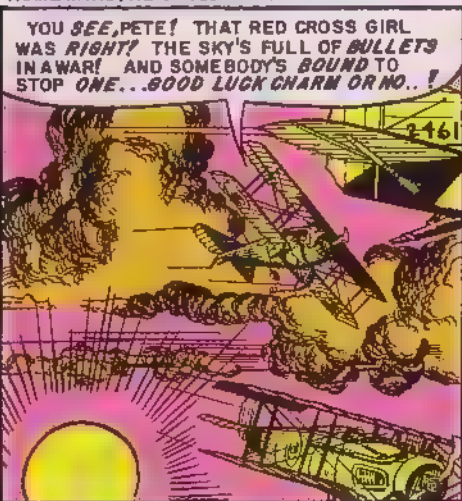
...GO INTO A LONG, LONG SPIN... AND DISAPPEAR IN A FLASH. HE SAW THE JERRY THAT'D GOTTEN HIS PAL, TOO... SAW HIM THROUGH A RED HAZE OF RAGE! HE GUNNED HIS SPAD STRAIGHT AT THE FOKKER... AND TRIPPED HIS VICKERS...



THE FOKKER SHUDDERED, THEN LICKED OUT A TONGUE OF FLAME AND SCREAMED EARTHWARD. BUDDY SHOOK HIS FIST AT IT, TEARS IN HIS EYES...



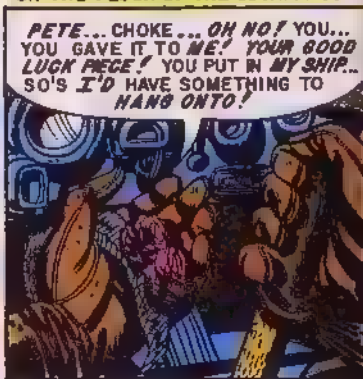
BUDDY GOT THREE MORE FOKKERS BEFORE THE REMAINING HUNS CALLED IT QUITS AND TOOK OFF WEST. AND, AS BUDDY STICKED HOMEWARD, HE SMILED ACIDLY...



HE SHOOK HIS HEAD SADLY...



SUDDENLY SOMETHING CAUGHT BUDDY'S EYE. SOMETHING BLUE... WITH RUFFLES... AND A PINK ROSE. BUD... LOOPED OVER THE STICK... ON THE FLOOR OF THE COCKPIT...



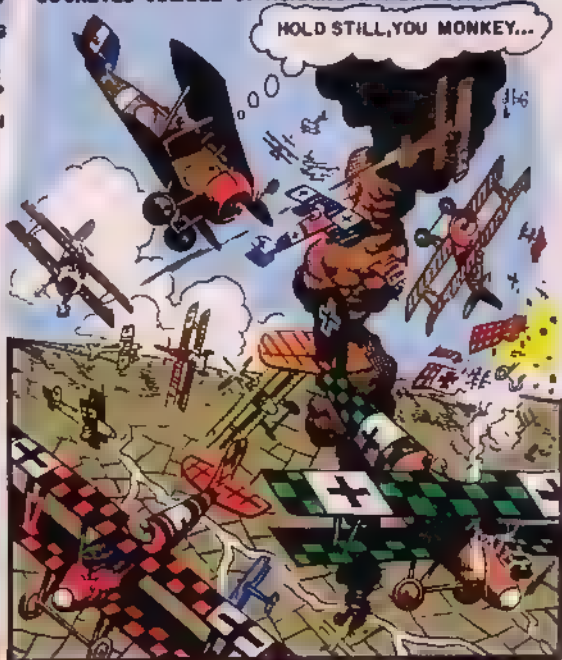
AND THERE WAS A TIGHTNESS IN BUD WILSON'S THROAT AS HE WHISPERED A "THANK YOU" TO HIS DEPARTED PAL...

THE NOVICE AND THE ACE

IT'S JUST ANOTHER ROUTINE DAY FOR US ACES OF SQUADRON 9. I SAY "ACES," BECAUSE THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT WE ARE. THERE ISN'T ONE OF US IN THE AIR TODAY WHO HASN'T BROUGHT DOWN AT LEAST THE FIVE HUN PLANES NECESSARY TO EARN THIS COVETED STATUS. BUT, DON'T THINK THAT I'M BRAGGING. WE'VE BEEN IN THIS SCRAP SINCE 1916. THORNTON, DAWES AND I FLEW WITH THE LAFAYETTE, AND THE REST SAW ACTION WITH OTHER FRENCH ESCADRILLES. SO, AS I SAY, IT'S JUST ANOTHER ROUTINE FLIGHT, IF YOU CAN CALL MOVING ALONG OVER ENEMY TERRITORY, LOOKING FOR HUN PLANES, ROUTINE. AND PRETTY SOON WE SEE THEM... DOWN BELOW... FLYING SO NEAT IN FORMATION, IT SEEMED A SHAME, ALMOST, TO HAVE TO BUST IT UP. BUT SQUADRON LEADER HIGGINS WAGS HIS WINGS AT US AND SLIPS OFF, AND WE ALL TEAR DOWN OUT OF THE CLOUDS, CARESSING OUR VICKERS' TRIPS...

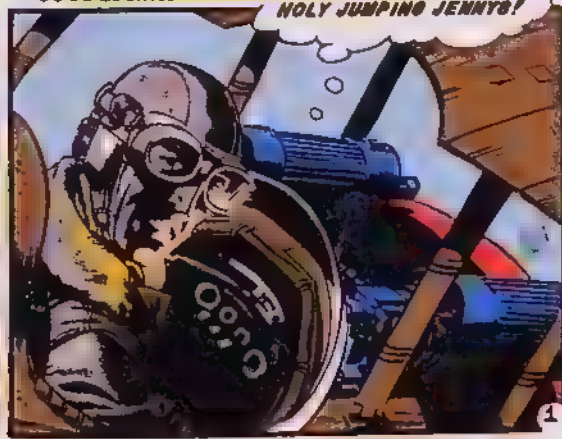
THE BOCHE CIRCUS CONSISTS OF ALBATROSS D.I "VEE-STRUTTERS," AND PFALZ D.III SCOUTS. ONE MINUTE, THEY'RE FLYING ALONG WITHOUT A CARE IN THE WORLD, AND THE NEXT MINUTE THEY'RE SCRAMBLING OUT OF OUR TRACER PATHS. I PICK ME A PFALZ OUT OF THE MESS AND CHASE HIM IN AND OUT OF THE COCKEYED JUMBLE OF ROARING WARBIRDS...

HOLD STILL, YOU MONKEY...



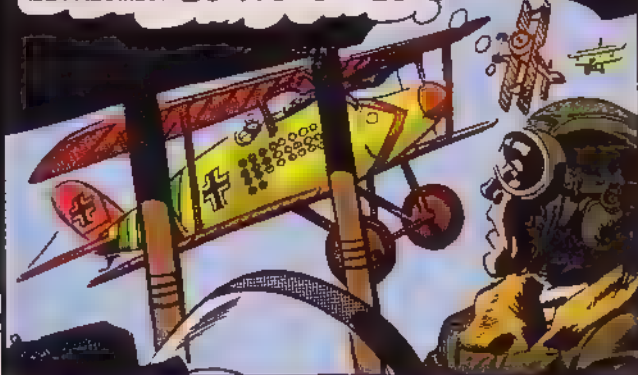
...UNTIL, FINALLY I CATCH HIM ON THE PERIMETER OF THAT MAYEM. HE'S LINED UP DEAD CENTER IN MY SIGHTS... AND I'M READY TO LET GO, WHEN OUT OF THE CORNER OF MY EYE, I SEE IT, AND I TAKE A GOOD LOOK...

HOLY JUMPING JENNYS!

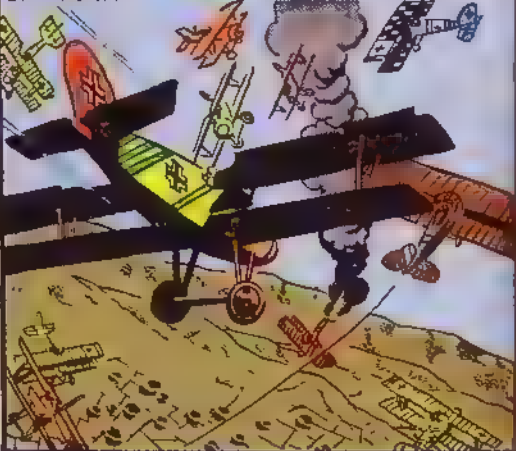


THERE'S THIS SINGLE, SOLITARY D III PFALZ, CRUISING AROUND THE BATTLE AREA LIKE HE OWNS IT. BUT WHAT I'M TAKING A GOOD LOOK AT ARE THE PRETTY COLORED CIRCLES ON ITS SIDE! EMBLEMS! AMERICAN... FRENCH... BRITISH... EACH ONE INDICATING A PLANE THE PILOT OF THAT PFALZ HAS SHOT DOWN.

...24...25...26! 26 VICTORIES!

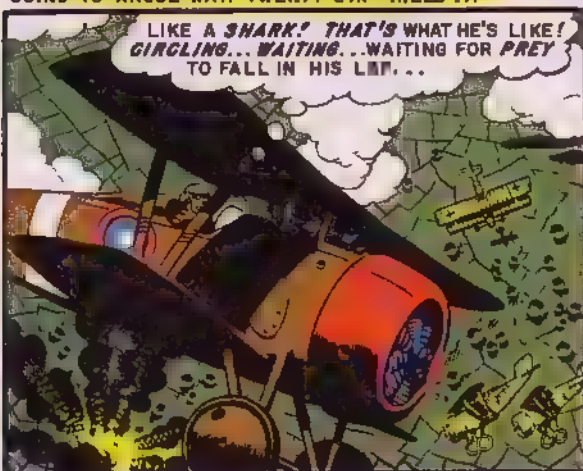


WELL, JUST THEN, THE PFALZ ROLLS OVER LIKE A HUNGRY SHARK AND COMES AFTER ME. I REMEMBER AN APPOINTMENT I HAVE UPSTAIRS, AND I CLIMB... BUT FAST...



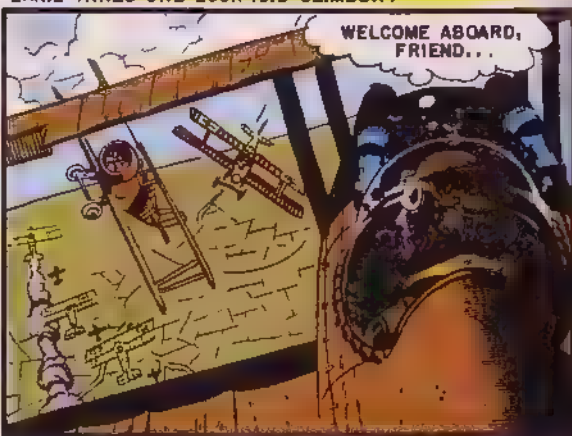
BUT THIS GUY DOESN'T EVEN FOLLOW ME... LIKE I'M BENEATH HIS CONTEMPT. I'M INSULTED... BUT WHO'S GOING TO ARGUE WITH TWENTY SIX "KILLS"...

LIKE A SHARK? THAT'S WHAT HE'S LIKE! CIRCLING... WAITING... WAITING FOR PREY TO FALL IN HIS LHM...



THIRTY SECONDS LATER I GET COMPANY UPSTAIRS. ERNIE BRUCE HAS JUST SENT AN ALBY D3 FLUTTERING DOWN AFTER SHOOTING OFF ONE OF ITS WINGS, WHEN THIS SEPTUPLE-PLUS HENRIE ACE MAKES A PASS AT HIM. ERNIE TAKES ONE LOOK AND CLIMBS...

WELCOME ABOARD, FRIEND...



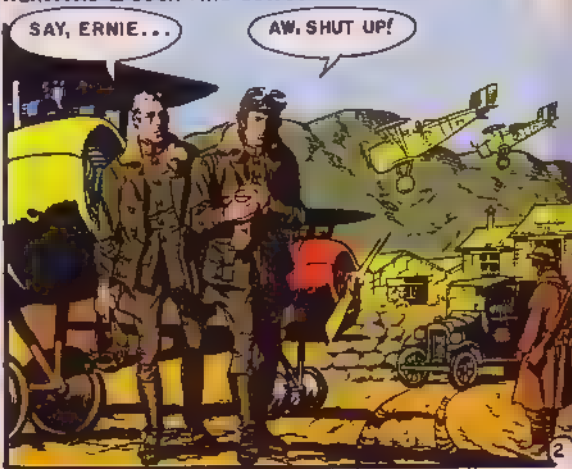
IT ISN'T LONG BEFORE THE REST OF THE OUTFIT EACH GETS A GANDER AT THIS BOCHE ACE DARTING IN AND OUT. AND NOBODY WANTS TO GIVE HIM A CHANCE TO ADD TO HIS COLLECTION OF INSIGNIAS. SO, WE ALL GET HORS DE COMBAT FAST. IN PLAIN AMERICAN, WE BEAT IT...



BELIEVE ME, WHEN WE GET BACK TO THE 'DROME, WE'RE ALL FEELING PRETTY ROTTEN. NOBODY'S IN A MOOD TO TALK... AS I SOON FIND OUT...

SAY, ERNIE...

AW, SHUT UP!



IT'S HARD TO EXPLAIN HOW WE FEEL, REALLY. THAT HEINIE WITH ALL THOSE "KILLS" PAINTED ON THE SIDE OF HIS PFALZ HAD US PRETTY SCARED, AND IT'S AS IF WE'RE ALL MAD AT EACH OTHER... OR AT OURSELVES FOR BEING SCARED. SO WE ALL STRAGGLE, GRIM-FACED AND SILENT, INTO THE CANTEEN...

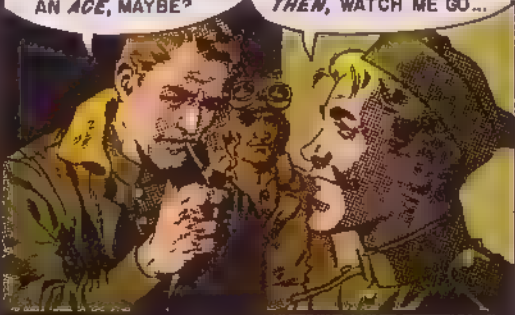
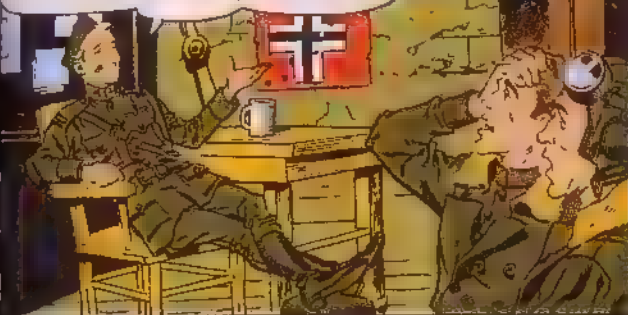
AS IF THINGS WEREN'T BAD ENOUGH, THIS HAS TO HAPPEN. HERE'S THIS KID, GREEN AS GRASS, EXUDING CONFIDENCE BY THE GALLON. I'M IN NO MOOD FOR CONFIDENT GREEN KIDS SO I STROLL OVER REAL SLOW

AH, YOU'RE BACK FROM YOUR SORTIE I SEE! ALLOW ME TO INTRODUCE MYSELF. I AM YOUR NEW SQUADRON MATE! PAT PIERCE IS THE NAME! HOW DO YOU DO, GENTLEMEN.

OH, GROAN. NO!

PIERCE? PIERCE? THAT NAME HAS A FAMILIAR RING! CAN IT BE WE'VE HEARD OF YOU, PIERCE? AN ACE, MAYBE?

OH, NO! NOT YET! YOU'LL HAVE TO ALLOW ME A WEEK OR SO TO GET THE FEEL OF IT. THEN, WATCH ME GO...



MATTER OF FACT, MY FLIGHT INSTRUCTOR BACK IN THE STATES SAID I AM A NATURAL BORN FLIER!

SO IS A DUCK, PIERCE!

OH, SAY! THAT'S VERY AMUSING! BUT MAY I ADD THAT I ALSO WON SEVERAL HONORS FOR MARKSMANSHIP! YOU MAY BE ASSURED, GENTLEMEN, THAT IN THE NEXT WEEKS, THE ENEMY WILL BE AWARE OF A MARKED IMPROVEMENT IN THIS SQUADRON'S COMBAT RECORD...

PIERCE! ANYBODY AS FULL OF GAS AS YOU OUGHT TO BE FLYING BALLOONS!

LAY OFF, WILLIS! THE KID'LL LEARN THE HARD WAY! ANYHOW. MAYBE THIS OUTFIT COULD USE SOMEBODY WITH A LITTLE SELF-CONFIDENCE...

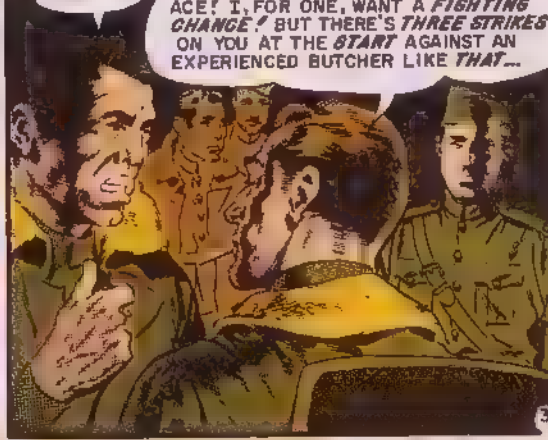


AND JUST WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY THAT?

I MEAN LET'S STOP KIDDING OURSELVES! YOU...ME... ALL OF US... WE WERE SCARED TO DEATH OF THAT HEINIE WITH ALL THOSE "VICTORY RINGS" DECORATING HIS PFALZ.

LOOK! I DON'T LET ANYBODY CALL ME YELLOW!

NOBODY SAYS YOU'RE YELLOW, WILLIS! BUT YOU'RE A LIAR IF YOU SAY YOU WEREN'T SCARED! WE ALL GOT THE WIND UP WHEN WE SPOTTED THAT HUN ACE! I, FOR ONE, WANT A FIGHTING CHANCE! BUT THERE'S THREE STRIKES ON YOU AT THE START AGAINST AN EXPERIENCED BUTCHER LIKE THAT...



SO IT'S OUT! WE DON'T LIKE ADMITTING IT, BUT WE ARE SCARED! LIKE ART MILBURN SAID, WE GOT THE WIND UP! ANYHOW, THIS PIERCE KID, WHO NEVER EVEN SAW A DOG-FIGHT, INSISTS UPON HAVING HIS SAY...

GENTLEMEN! THERE IS NO ONE SO GOOD, THAT THERE ISN'T SOMEONE BETTER...SOMEWHERE...



WELL, THAT DOES IT! WE'RE ALL ON EDGE AND THIS COCKSURE NOVICE PUSHES US OVER. CHUCK SNYDER, USUALLY THIS NICEST, EASIEST-GOING GUY YOU'D EVER WANT TO MEET, GRABS PIERCE BY THE COAT AND EXPLODES...

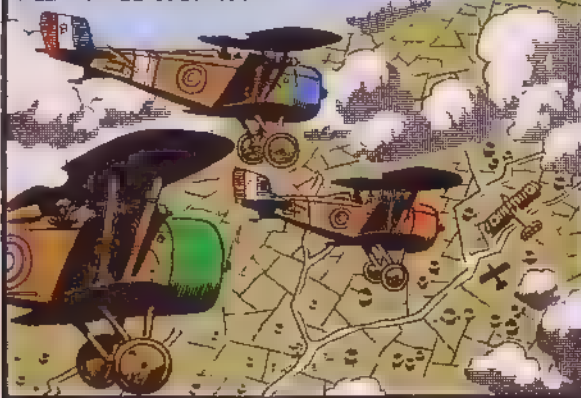
SHUT YOUR MOUTH, Y'HEAR! SHUT IT OR I'LL SHUT IT FOR YOU...



WELL, SCARED OR NOT, WHEN THE ORDER COMES FOR US TO GO OUT ON PATROL NEXT A.M., WE GO. ME AND ERNIE MUNSON AND...GUESS WHO? THAT'S RIGHT! THE CONFIDENCE KID HIMSELF, PIERCE! WE TAKE OFF AT DAWN...



AS IF THERE ISN'T ENOUGH TO WORRY ABOUT, NOW WE GOT A GREEN KID TO NURSEMAID. SURE HE CAN TAKE OFF AND FLY IN A STRAIGHT LINE. BUT I CAN'T HELP THINKING WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN IF WE RUN INTO A HEINIE PATROL. WE DON'T THOUGH! IT'S JUST A LONE PFALZ D. III WE SEE BELOW...



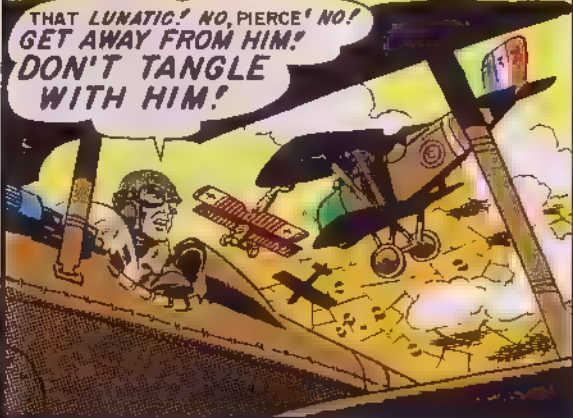
ERNIE DIVES. I FOLLOW. THE KID, PIERCE, COMES AFTER ME. BUT ERNIE KEEPS GOING RIGHT PAST THE PFALZ. AND WHEN I REACH IT, I SEE WHY. IT'S THE HUN ACE WITH THE TWENTY-SIX "KILLS"...

I. I GOT NO RIGHT RISKIN' THIS AEROPLANE!

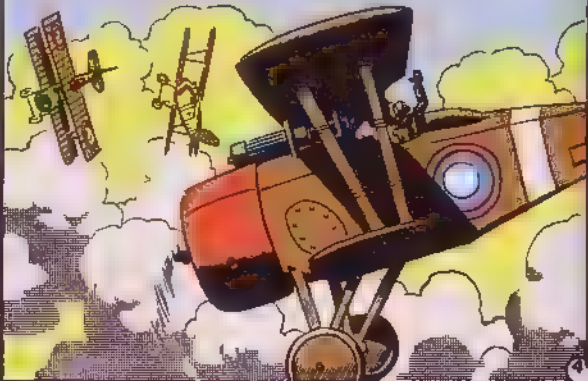


SO I KEEP GOING, TOO! I SEE ERNIE HEAD FOR HOME, AND I KICK RUDDER AFTER HIM. THEN I SEE HIM POINT BACK WILDLY, AND I LOOK BACK AND FEEL SICK.

THAT LUNATIC! NO, PIERCE! NO! GET AWAY FROM HIM! DON'T TANGLE WITH HIM!



I WAGGLE MY WINGS! I POINT! I SHAKE MY HEAD! I YELL! NATURALLY, THE KID CAN'T HEAR ME, BUT, EITHER HE'S BLIND, OR HE DON'T KNOW FROM FEAR, OR HE'S JUST PLAIN STUPID. HE STAYS TO FIGHT IT OUT WITH THE PFALZ. I FEEL PRETTY GUILTY ABOUT LEAVIN' HIM... BUT...LIKE I SAID. NIEUPORTS DON'T GROW ON TREES...



AS ERNIE AND I TAKE OFF, THE KID IS CIRCLING THE HEINIE KILLER LIKE HE'S LOOKING FOR AN OPENING. I'M PRAYING HE'LL SEE THOSE EMBLEMS ON THE SIDE OF THE D. III AND CATCH ON, BUT AS THE TWO PLANES FADE INTO TINY SPECKS BEHIND US, PIERCE IS STILL CIRCLING...



BACK AT THE DROME, ME AND ERNIE ARE FEELING ROTTEN ABOUT LEAVING THE KID, AND THE OTHER BOYS ARE TRYING TO ASSURE US THAT IT WASN'T OUR FAULT...

YOU *TRIED* TO GET HIM AWAY! YOU *TOLD* HIM TO FOLLOW YOU! WHAT *MORE* COULD YOU DO?



IT MAKES SENSE, BUT JUST THE SAME, EVERYONE OF US BATTLE-HARDENED ACES SIT ON THE EDGE OF OUR CHAIRS, THINKING ABOUT THAT NOVICE UP THERE AGAINST THAT BOCHE TERROR OF THE SKIES. AND EVERYEAR IS COCKED FOR THE SOUND OF A MOTOR...

I SPILL IT OUT! WHAT I'M THINKING, I SPILL IT OUT AND I DON'T CARE WHO IT HURTS...

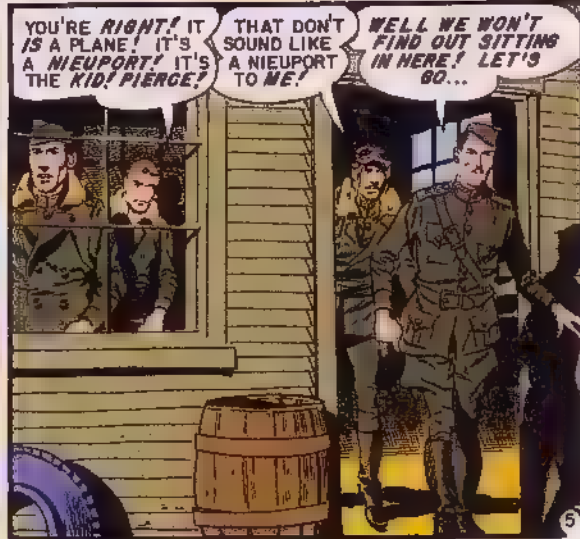
I... *KNOW* WHAT MORE WE COULD'VE DONE! WE COULD'VE *STUCK WITH HIM!* THREE OF US MIGHT HAVE *LICKED* THAT... THAT...

YEAH! BUT HOW MANY OF YOU WOULD HE HAVE GOTTEN? *ONE? TWO? MAYBE ALL THREE OF YOU?*

I KNOW *ONE* THING! THAT *KID*... THAT *GREEN KID*... HE WASN'T AFRAID OF HIM! WHICH IS MORE THAN I CAN SAY FOR *ME*... OR *YOU*. OR *ANY OF US!* IT'S NOT LIKE HE DIDN'T *KNOW* WHAT HE WAS TAKING ON! HE *HEARD* US TALKING! HE...



SH-H-H! *LISTEN!* WHAT?! WHAT IS IT? IT'S... IT'S A PLANE... I DON'T HEAR... *SHUT UP AND LISTEN!*

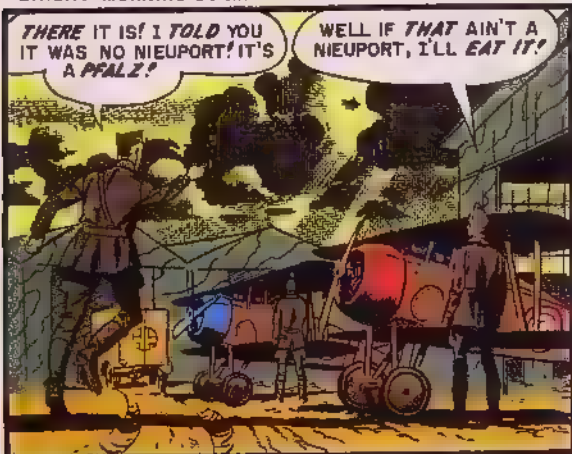


YOU'RE *RIGHT!* IT IS A PLANE! IT'S A *NIEUPORT!* IT'S THE *KID!* PIERCE! THAT DON'T SOUND LIKE A *NIEUPORT* TO ME! *WELL WE WON'T FIND OUT SITTING IN HERE! LET'S GO...*

WE TEAR OUT ONTO THE FIELD AND SQUINT INTO THE BRIGHT MORNING SUN...

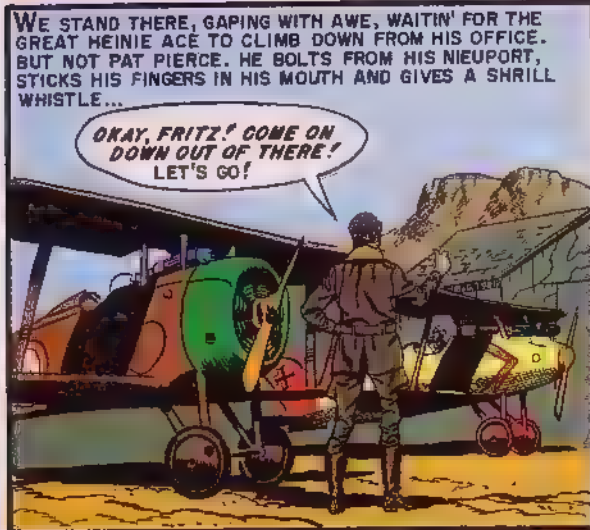
THERE IT IS! I TOLD YOU IT WAS NO NIEUPORT! IT'S A PFALZ!

WELL IF THAT AIN'T A NIEUPORT, I'LL EAT IT!



WE STAND THERE, GAPING WITH AWE, WAITIN' FOR THE GREAT HEINIE ACE TO CLIMB DOWN FROM HIS OFFICE. BUT NOT PAT PIERCE. HE BOLTS FROM HIS NIEUPORT, STICKS HIS FINGERS IN HIS MOUTH AND GIVES A SHRILL WHISTLE...

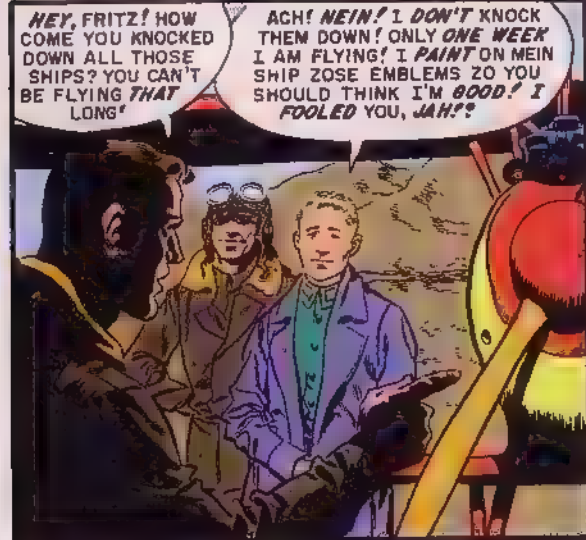
OKAY, FRITZ! COME ON DOWN OUT OF THERE! LET'S GO!



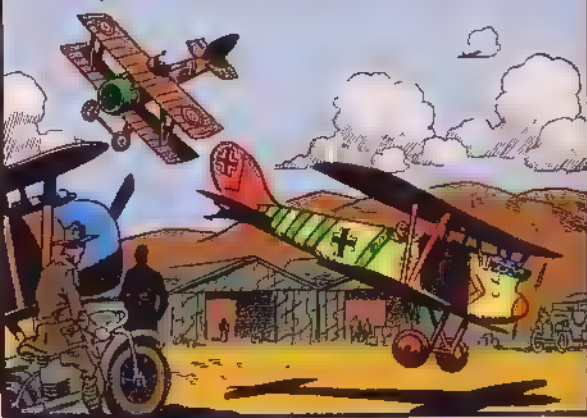
I POINT TO THE EMBLEMS ON THE SIDE OF THE PFALZ...

HEY, FRITZ! HOW COME YOU KNOCKED DOWN ALL THOSE SHIPS? YOU CAN'T BE FLYING THAT LONG!

ACH! NEIN! I DON'T KNOCK THEM DOWN! ONLY ONE WEEK I AM FLYING! I PAINT ON MEIN SHIP ZOSE EMBLEMS SO YOU SHOULD THINK I'M GOOD! I FOOLED YOU, JAH?!



WE'RE BOTH RIGHT. FIRST, THE PFALZ D.III COMES DOWN! THE PFALZ D.III! THE ONE WITH TWENTY-SIX "KILLS" PAINTED ON ITS SIDE! AND RIGHT BEHIND IT, PAT PIERCE'S NIEUPORT, WITH THE KID HIMSELF AT THE STICK...

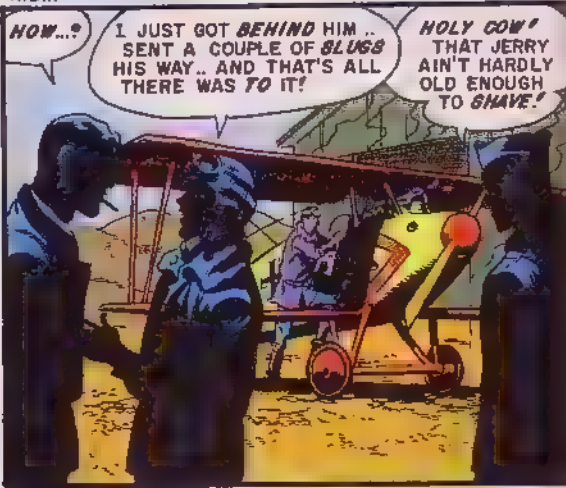


WHILE THE HEINIE CLIMBS DOWN, I ASK THE GRINNING KID...

HOW...?

I JUST GOT BEHIND HIM .. SENT A COUPLE OF SLUGS HIS WAY.. AND THAT'S ALL THERE WAS TO IT!

HOLY COW! THAT JERRY AIN'T HARDLY OLD ENOUGH TO SHAVE!

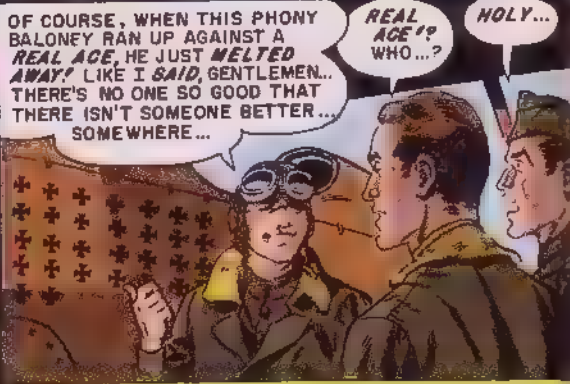


WE LOOK AT THE SELF-STYLED HUN ACE. AND THEN WE LOOK AT PAT PIERCE. AND HE WINKS AND POINTS TO HIS NIEUPORT...

OF COURSE, WHEN THIS PHONY BALONEY RAN UP AGAINST A REAL ACE, HE JUST MELTED AWAY! LIKE I SAID, GENTLEMEN... THERE'S NO ONE SO GOOD THAT THERE ISN'T SOMEONE BETTER... SOMEWHERE...

REAL ACE? WHO...?

HOLY...



WE ALL STARE AT THE STILL-STICKY BLACK IRON CROSSES PAINTED ON PIERCE'S NIEUPORT! THERE ARE THIRTY OF THEM! AND THEN WE ALL LOOK AT EACH OTHER AND WISH WE COULD FIND A HOLE TO CRAWL INTO!

- THE END -

THE LAST LAUGH

A few more steps, a quick leap to the cockpit—and it would be done. Almost, Oberlieutenant Karl Von Horst could smile. These Americans were so naive, so trusting. Here and there, scattered about the tarmac of the American 'drome, a dozen of them went about various tasks, and none noted that Von Horst's casual, easy strolling, apparently so completely without direction, had carried him within half a dozen yards of the Spad which stood alone at the far end of the field. This would be almost too easy. But then, he had known almost from the first, when his Fokker had been blasted by the Americans and he had been forced down and taken prisoner, that escape would be easy.

It had happened four days earlier. The Americans had dived out of the sun, catching the German squadron completely unawares. A quick burst of fire from twin Vickers and Von Horst's Fokker had been out of control. He had made a crash landing not five hundred feet from the Americans' field—and they had been waiting. Too many of them. Von Horst had not been fool enough to attempt to shoot his way free. He had smiled gracefully and raised his hands—and it was then that he had known what fools the Americans were. He could still hear the Yankee colonel's words: "After all, we're all officers and gentlemen, Lieutenant. It will be some days before I can arrange for your transfer to a prison camp. Until then, you may be our guest—provided you give me your word as a gentleman that you will not attempt to escape."

This time, Von Horst did smile. His word! The idiots. This was war, and in war a soldier used any weapon that came to hand. He had given his word, of course, and in return he

had been permitted the freedom of the 'drome. And he had used his freedom well. To jibe, to jeer, to make mock of the Americans' flying, of their gunnery. Oh, not bluntly, of course. Subtly. So that his words hurt. So that the Yankee Colonel had exploded, at last. What had been his last words? ... Oh, yes: "All right, Von Horst, that's enough! I'll grant you that our skill may sometimes not be up to that of your fliers. But we haven't been trained for war all our lives. In our country, we strive for peace!"

The Colonel had been upset. Oh, very much upset. He had gone on to say that the Germans had the advantage in time, in length of training, but that one day, soon, the raw American pilots would equal and pass the skill of the Germans. AS if that were possible! These Americans were not suited for war. *They* would not use any weapon—as Von Horst would ...

Ah! One more step—Lithely, Von Horst leaped to the Spad's stirrup, into the cockpit. His fingers found the unfamiliar controls—and then, suddenly, he froze. Suddenly there was a chatter behind him, and the whine of lead about his ears. He turned, looked up—and the smile died on his lips. The Yankee squadron dove, full strength, one ship after the other, guns blazing ... There was still the ghost of a smile on Von Horst's lips when he died.

He never knew when the American squadron landed, when the Colonel spoke to his pilots: "Well done, gentlemen. Our gunnery is improving, thanks to Von Horst. I never would have thought of using that old Spad as a practice target if he hadn't kept at us about our sloppy shooting. . . "

HOME AGAIN

IT WASN'T THAT I WANTED TO FLY. NOT AT FIRST, ANYWAY. IT WAS JUST THAT I'D HAD MY BELLYFUL OF THE MUDDY, GOOTIE-INFESTED TRENCHES OF FRANCE. WE WERE THE TOUGH BOYS, WE FOREIGN LEGIONAIRES... SUPPOSEDLY! SO WE WERE ALWAYS UP FRONT, IN THE THICK OF THE FIGHTING... WITH BOCHE SHELLS ZEROING IN ON US AND SHRAPNEL RIPPING MEN APART ALL AROUND ME. ANYTHING WAS BETTER THAN THAT! SO WHILE MY LUCK WAS HOLDING OUT, I PUT IN FOR A TRANSFER TO THE FRENCH AIR FORCE. I STRETCHED THE TRUTH A LITTLE ON THE APPLICATION, AND PESTERED 'EM FOR ALMOST A YEAR, AND FINALLY... IN MAY, 1917... I WAS SENT TO A TRAINING FIELD NEAR PARIS FOR A TRYOUT...

SACRE BLEU! THAT CRAZY AMERICAN WILL KILL HIMSELF!

WHAT IS WORSE, HE WILL WRECK THE NIEUPORT! WE CANNOT SPARE A SINGLE AEROPLANE!



I THOUGHT I'D SHOW THOSE FRENCHMEN I KNEW PLENTY ABOUT FLYING, AND I WAS DOING ALL RIGHT, I GUESS, TILL I WENT INTO A PIQUE WITH MY THROTTLE WIDE OPEN...

WHAT THE...? THE FABRIC'S RIPPING RIGHT OFF THE WINGS...

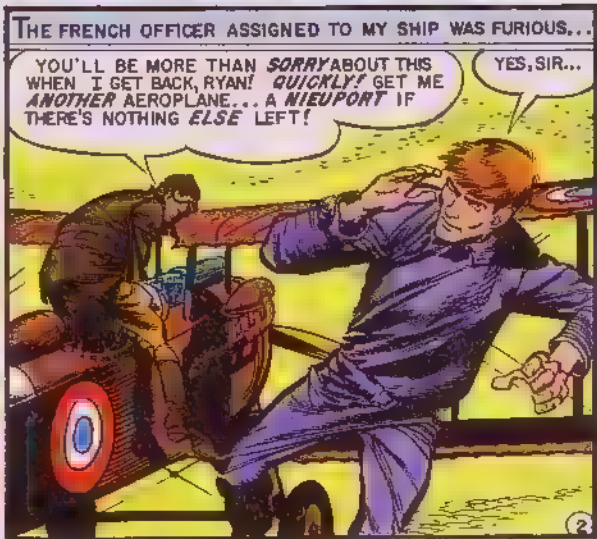
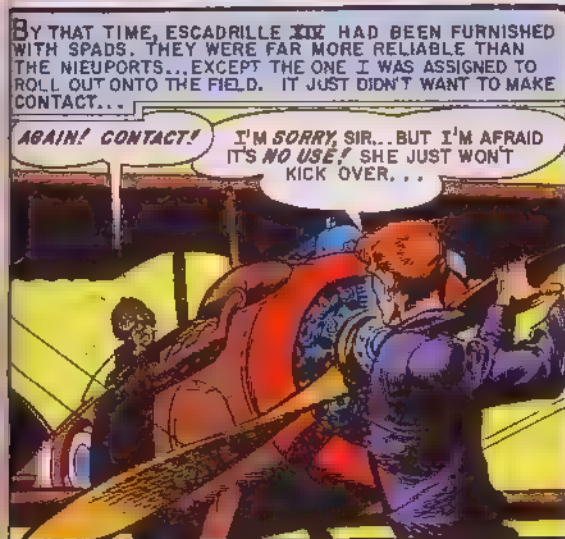
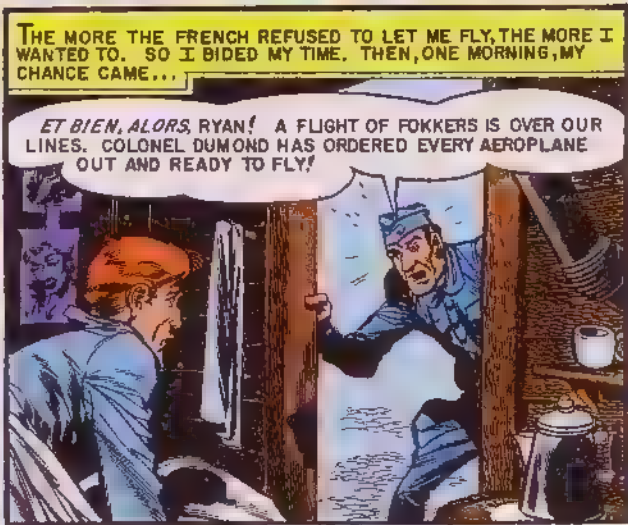
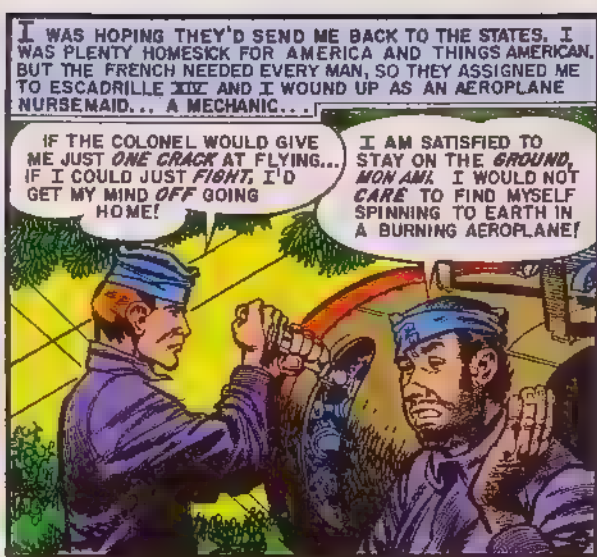
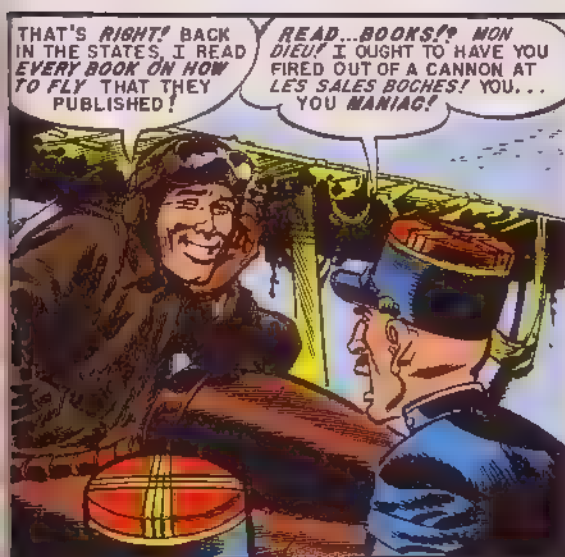


I LEVELLED OFF AT TWO HUNDRED FEET, BUT WITH PRACTICALLY NOTHING LEFT ON THE WINGS TO SUPPORT THE CRATE, I PANNED SMACK DOWN IN THE MIDDLE OF THE DROME. THE FRENCHIES CAME RUNNING UP LIKE CRAZY

LOOK! NOT A SCRATCH...

IDIOT! YOU HAVE RUINED THE AEROPLANE! ON YOUR APPLICATION, YOU SAID YOU KNEW HOW TO FLY!

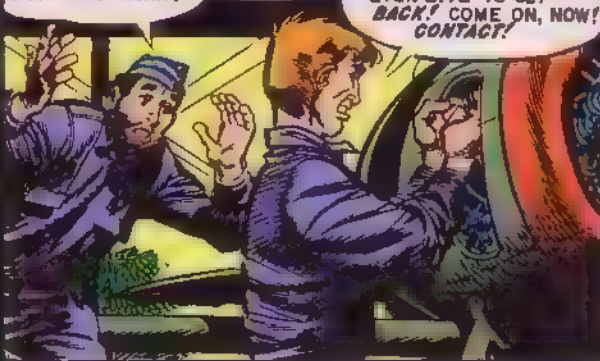




THAT SPAD WAS "HORS DE COMBAT," AS THE FRENCH PUT IT, BECAUSE I'D MADE IT THAT WAY! RIGHT AFTER MY PILOT TOOK OFF IN ANOTHER SHIP, I PULLED THE MAGNETO CAPS FROM MY POCKET AND REPLACED THEM IN THE SPAD'S ENGINE...

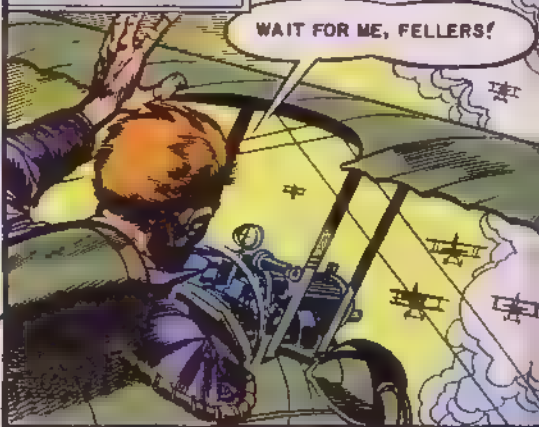
YOU AMERICANS ARE MAD! THE COLONEL WILL HAVE YOUR SKIN FOR THIS, RYAN!

I'M NOT WORRIED, GASTON! I MAY NOT EVEN LIVE TO GET BACK! COME ON, NOW! CONTACT!



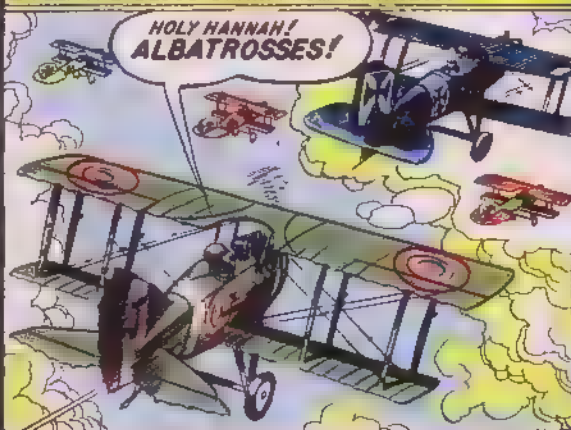
I JUST MISSED THE TOP OF A HANGER TAKING OFF. ONCE I WAS UP, I LET THE SPAD HAVE HER HEAD AND LIT OUT AFTER THE REST OF THE XIV. I CAUGHT SIGHT OF EM SOON AND BURNED UP A LOT OF SAUCE TRYING TO CATCH UP...

WAIT FOR ME, FELLERS!



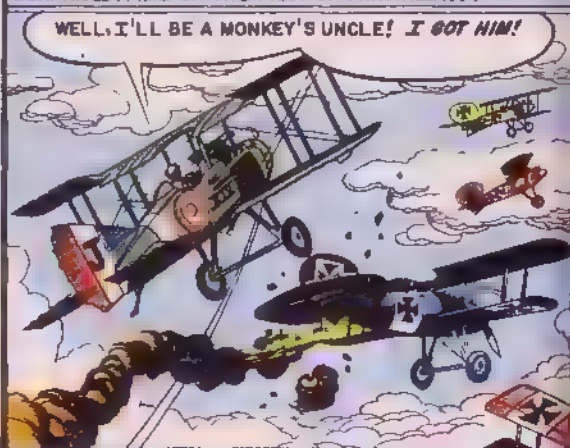
I JOINED 'EM FINALLY AND HUNG ONTO THE TAIL END OF THE FLIGHT, CRUISING ALONG JUST FINE. BUT SOMETHING DIDN'T SEEM QUITE RIGHT. I COULD FEEL IT. THEN I TOOK A GOOD LOOK AT THE SHIP IN FRONT OF ME AND I FELT THE BLOOD DRAIN FROM MY FACE...

HOLY HANNAH! ALBATROSSES!



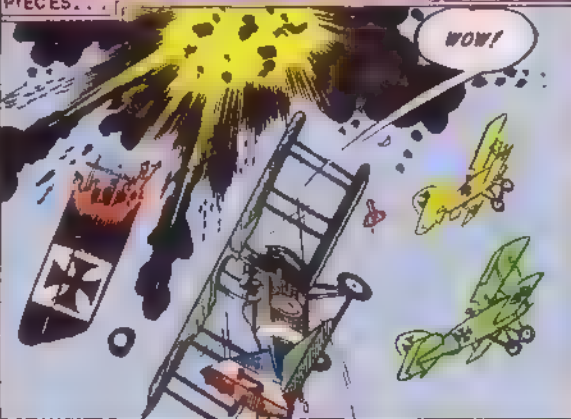
I SWALLOWED HARD, AIMED THE NOSE OF MY SPAD DEAD ON THE TAIL OF THE BOCHE PLANE IN FRONT OF ME, AND SQUEEZED MY GUN TRIPS. I DON'T KNOW WHO WAS MORE SURPRISED... ME OR THE PILOT OF THAT ALBY...

WELL, I'LL BE A MONKEY'S UNCLE! I GOT HIM!



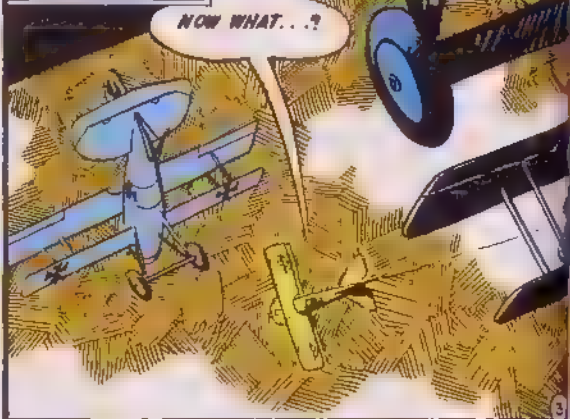
I STICKED DOWN AND ZOOMED. THE FIRST ALBATROSS WAS STILL SPINNING TO EARTH SPITTING UGLY BLACK SMOKE WHEN I CAME UP UNDER THE BELLY OF MY NEXT CUSTOMER AND SENT A STREAM OF TRACERS INTO IT. THE SHIP SHUDDERED AND EXPLODED INTO A MILLION PIECES...

WOW!

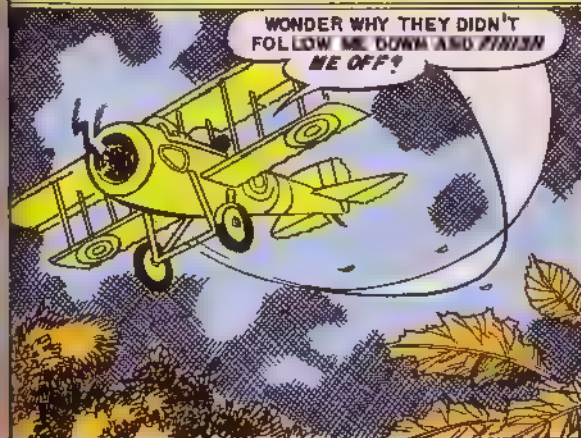


THE BOCHE FLIGHT LEADER CAUGHT ON, THEN. HE PULLED A NEAT RENVERSEMENT AND THE REST OF HIS BLACK-CROSSED FLOCK FOLLOWED. THEY GOT OVER ME AND CAME SCREAMING DOWN, SENDING A SHOWER OF STEEL AHEAD OF THEM...

NOW WHAT...?

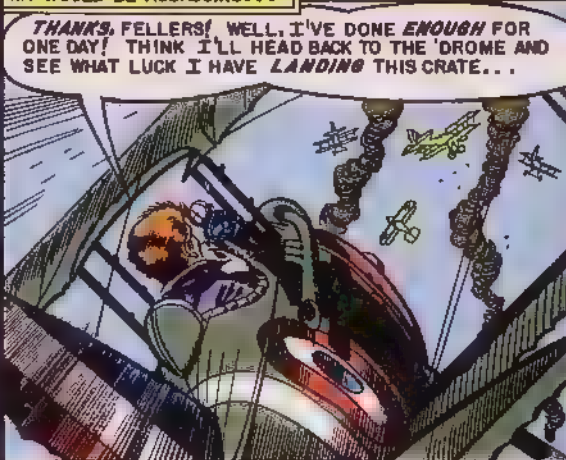


I PUT THE SPAD INTO A VORLE, LIKE IT SAID IN THE BOOKS I'D READ, SO THE BOCHE WOULD THINK I WAS FALLING OUT OF CONTROL. WHEN I LEVELED OFF, THERE WASN'T AN ALBY ON MY TAIL! I BREATHED A SIGH OF RELIEF...



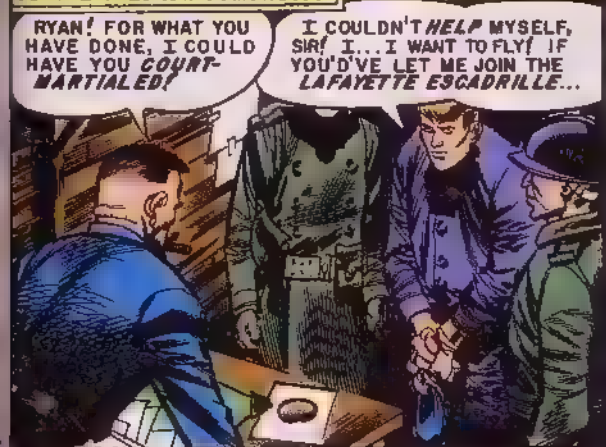
WONDER WHY THEY DIDN'T FOLLOW ME DOWN AND FINISH ME OFF!

THEN I SAW WHY! THE REST OF THE XIX TH HAD SHOWED UP AND WERE NOW ENGAGED IN A SCREAMING DOG FIGHT WITH MY WOULD-BE ASSASSINS...



THANKS, FELLERS! WELL, I'VE DONE ENOUGH FOR ONE DAY! THINK I'LL HEAD BACK TO THE 'DROME AND SEE WHAT LUCK I HAVE LANDING THIS CRATE...

I MADE A GOOD LANDING, ALL RIGHT! IN FACT, I LANDED RIGHT IN THE GUARD HOUSE! WHEN THE REST OF THE ESCADRILLE RETURNED AND REPORTED, I WAS BROUGHT BEFORE COLONEL DUMOND...



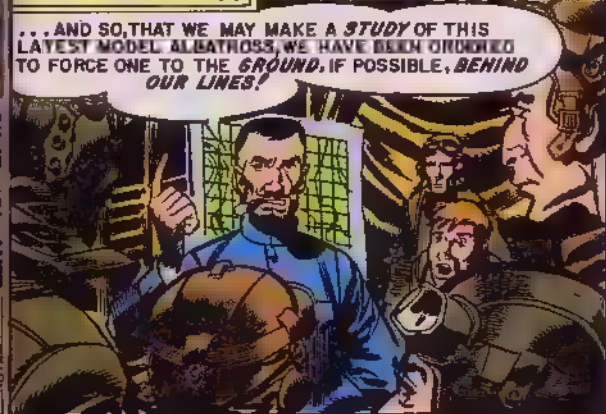
RYAN! FOR WHAT YOU HAVE DONE, I COULD HAVE YOU COURT-MARTIALED!

I COULDN'T HELP MYSELF, SIR! I... I WANT TO FLY! IF YOU'D'VE LET ME JOIN THE LAFAYETTE ESCADRILLE...

YOU WILL NOT INTERRUPT! ALORS... THE OTHER MEMBERS OF THE FLIGHT HAVE TOLD ME HOW YOU... SINGLEHANDED... BROUGHT DOWN TWO ENEMY PLANES. RYAN! YOU ARE IMPUDENT AND RECKLESS! BUT... MALHEUREUX... WE NEED YOU! WE NEED EVERYONE WE CAN GET! YOU WANTED TO FLY, SARGEANT RYAN! YOU WILL FLY... WITH THE XIX TH! THE SPAD IS YOURS!



I DON'T HAVE TO TELL YOU HOW I FELT ABOUT MY PROMOTION. I WAS EAGER TO TAKE TO THE SKIES AGAIN. BUT THE NEXT COUPLE OF DAYS WERE DUDS... GREY, MISTY AND WET. NOW THAT I WAS OFFICIALLY AN AVIATOR, I ITCHED FOR ACTION. THEN, FINALLY, THE THIRD DAY DAWNED BRIGHT AND CLEAR...



... AND SO, THAT WE MAY MAKE A STUDY OF THIS LATEST MODEL ALBATROSS, WE HAVE BEEN ORDERED TO FORCE ONE TO THE GROUND, IF POSSIBLE, BEHIND OUR LINES!

THAT IS A BIG ORDER, SIR. IT WOULD TAKE A MIRACLE... NEVERTHELESS, MONSIEUR, YOU WILL TRY YOUR BEST TO BRING ABOUT THAT MIRACLE! N'EST-CE QUE PAS? THAT IS ALL! BONNE CHANCE!

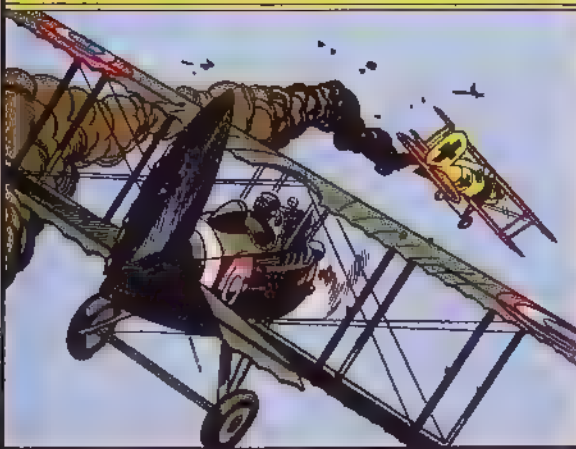


WE PATROLLED DAY AFTER DAY FOR ALMOST A WEEK BUT THE CLOSEST WE CAME TO TAKING ONE OF THOSE NEW ALBYS "ALIVE" WAS WHEN OUR FLIGHT LEADER, LIEUTENANT JEAN BONELLE, FOLLOWED A CRIPPLED ONE TO THE GROUND. BUT, UNFORTUNATELY, WHEN IT CAME IN, IT STRUCK A TREE STUMP, TURNED OVER, AND CAUGHT FIRE...

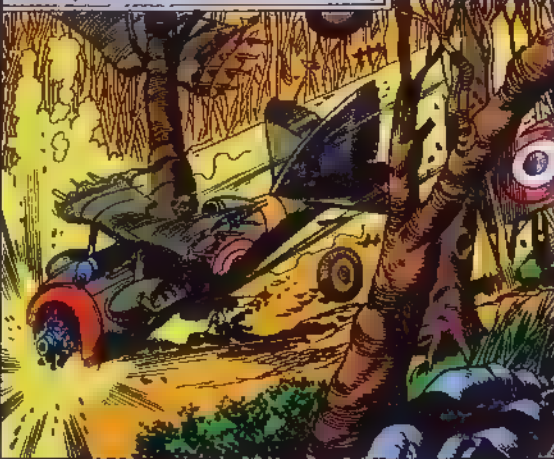
IT'LL BURN TO A CRISP! TOUGH LUCK..



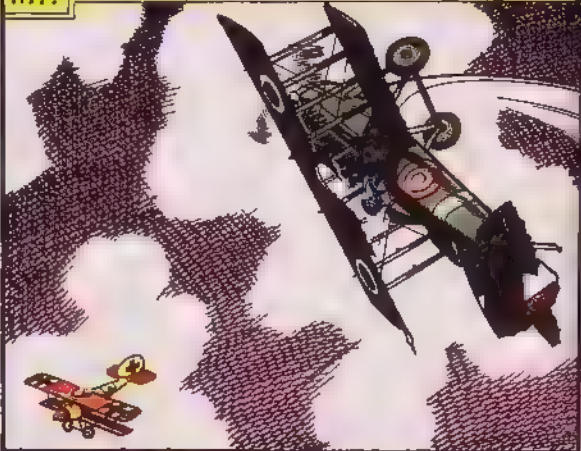
WE WERE A GOOD TEN MILES INSIDE HUNLAND BEFORE I GOT WITHIN MACHINE GUN RANGE. I SENT ALMOST A HUNDRED ROUNDS INTO THE BOCHE SHIP BEFORE ITS ENGINE STARTED SPEWING THAT TELL-TALE BLACK SMOKE.



I MANAGED TO BRING THE SPAD'S NOSE UP, LEVEL OFF, THEN SKIM INTO A WOODS. SHE HIT BETWEEN TWO TREES, SHEARING OFF HER WINGS...

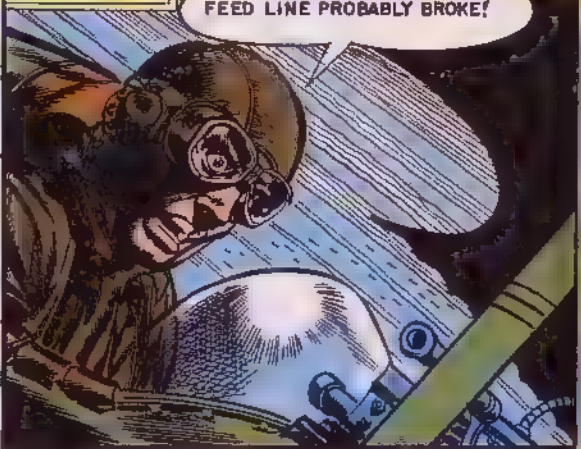


I SOON GREW TIRED OF THAT GAME. ONE MORNING, WHEN I SPOTTED A LONE FOKKER SNEAKING BACK TOWARD THE GERMAN LINES, I BROKE FORMATION AND CHASED AFTER IT...



I FOLLOWED IT DOWN TRIUMPHANTLY AND WATCHED IT FLOW IN, BUT WHEN I TRIED TO PULL OUT OF MY DIVE, MY HISPANO-SUIZA COUGHED A COUPLE OF TIMES AND WENT DEAD...

FEED LINE PROBABLY BROKE!

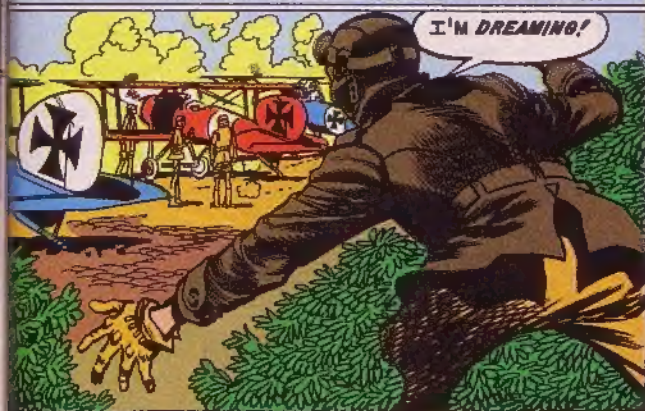


I CLIMBED FROM MY OFFICE UNHURT, AND TOOK OFF QUICK... SCARED THAT A BOCHE PATROL MIGHT COME AROUND TO INVESTIGATE. I WASN'T SURE OF MY DIRECTION UNTIL I CAME OUT OF THE WOODS...

HOLY SMOKE!



THERE, SPREAD OUT BEFORE ME, IN ALL ITS GRIM GLORY, WAS JAGDSTAFFE ALBATROSS XII! MECHANICS WERE RUSHING AROUND THE APRON, READYING THINGS FOR A FLIGHT. THE SQUADRON LEADERS SHIP SAT OUT FRONT OF TEN OTHERS... ALL OF THEM, THE NEW TYPE... PROPS SPINNING... READY TO TAKE OFF...



I'M DREAMING!

I MOVED IN BEHIND A HANGER, MY HANDS ITCHING TO GRAB ONE OF THOSE BIG BIRDS. THE LEAD PLANE'S COCKPIT WAS EMPTY. THE HEINIES SEEMED TO BE WAITING FOR THEIR FLIGHT COMMANDER...



I MUST BE AS LOONEY AS EVERYBODY AT THE XII TH SAYS I AM... EVEN TO BE THINKING WHAT I'M THINKING! I WOULDN'T STAND A CHANCE!

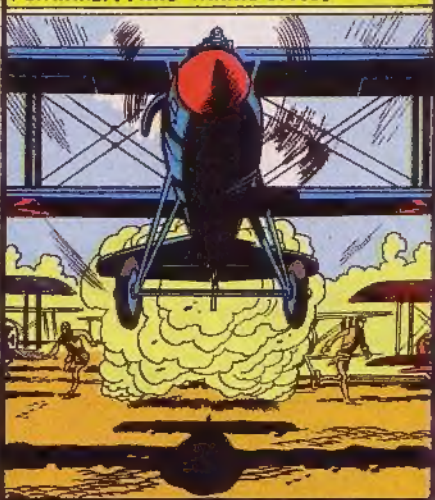
SOMETHING CAME OVER ME THEN. SOMETHING I COULDN'T CONTROL... A CRAZY KIND OF RECKLESSNESS. SUDDENLY, I WAS WALKING OUT ACROSS THAT APRON... BRAZEN AS YOU PLEASE... MAKING STRAIGHT FOR THAT EMPTY LEAD ALBATROSS...



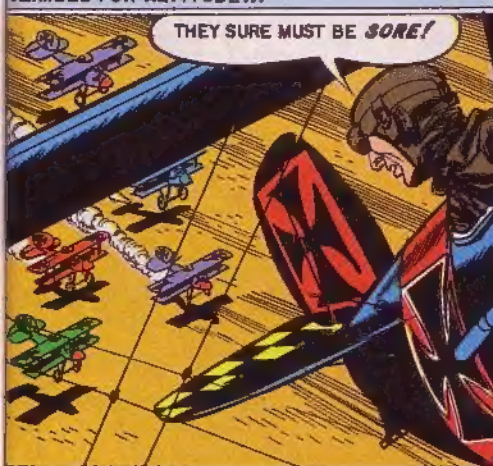
... THEN I WAS CLIMBING INTO THE COCKPIT...



... AND THE NEXT THING, I WAS RELEASING HER BRAKE PEDALS... THROTTLING HER FORWARD... AND TAKING OFF...



THE REST OF THE ALBYS ROARED AFTER ME AS I CLIMBED FOR ALTITUDE...



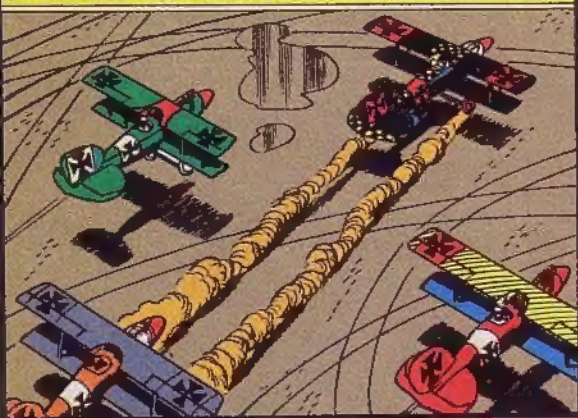
THEY SURE MUST BE SORE!

THERE I WAS, STREAMING WEST IN A BLACK-CROSSED GERMAN SHIP... WITH TEN OTHERS ON MY TAIL. AND THEY WOULDN'T LET GO... EVEN WHEN WE CROSSED OVER THE ALLIED LINES. I PULLED EVERY STUNT IN THE BOOK, BUT THEY HUNG ON. I WAS PUZZLED THOUGH, THEY NEVER FIRED A SHOT. THEN IT CAME TO ME...

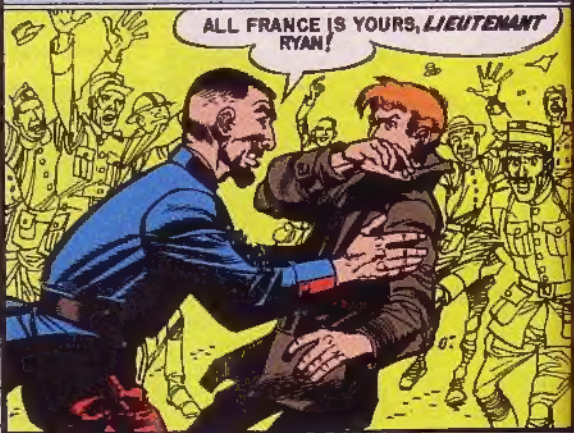
HEY, THEY'RE NOT CHASING ME! THEY'RE FOLLOWING ME!



WELL, SIR, THE REST IS HISTORY. YOU PROBABLY READ ABOUT IT, THINKING THEY WERE FOLLOWING THEIR FLIGHT LEADER, THE BLINDLY OBEDIENT BOCHES LANDED ON ESCADRILLE XIV'S 'DROME RIGHT BEHIND ME...



THE BEWILDERED FRENCHMEN TOOK THE WHOLE KIT AND KABOODLE PRISONERS, AND COLONEL DUMOND WAS SO PLEASED, HE KISSED ME REAL WET ON BOTH CHEEKS...

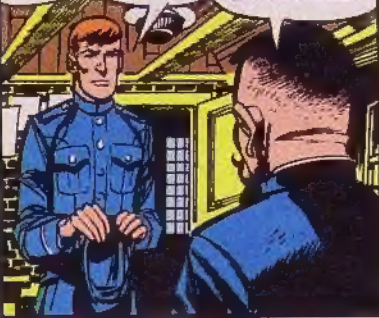


ALL FRANCE IS YOURS, LIEUTENANT RYAN!

SO I GOT ANOTHER PROMOTION. THIS TIME A COMMISSION IN THE FIELD. THAT NIGHT, I WENT TO SEE THE COLONEL WITH THE SAME OLD REQUEST, AND I GOT THE SAME OLD ANSWER...

BUT YOU SAID I COULD HAVE ANYTHING I WANT, SIR! I WANT TO FLY WITH AN ALL YANK OUT-FIT! THE LAFAYETTE

I AM SORRY, RYAN! IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO ASSIGN YOU TO THE LAFAYETTE ESCADRILLE!



IT IS NO MORE! HOWEVER SINCE YOU ARE ANXIOUS TO LEAVE US, I WILL GIVE YOU A TRANSFER ELSEWHERE! HERE ARE YOUR SEALED ORDERS.

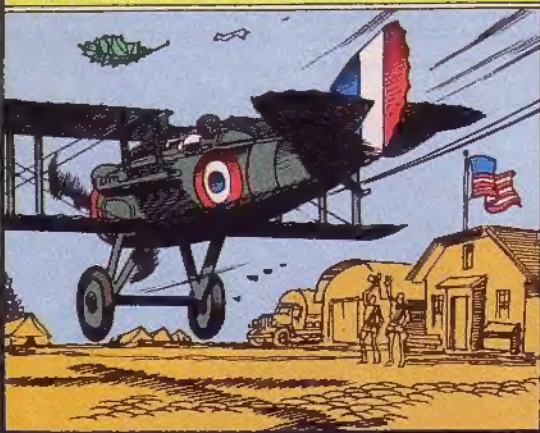


THAT TWINKLE IN THE COLONEL'S EYE PUZZLED ME. I WAS HURT. DISAPPOINTED AT NOT HAVING A CHANCE TO FLY WITH THE YANK VOLUNTEERS. ON APRIL 15TH, 1918, I FLEW MY SPAD TO A PLACE CALLED SUIPPE...

THAT'S GRATITUDE FOR YOU! I CAPTURE A WHOLE SQUADRON OF NEW ALBY'S AND THE COLONEL GIVES ME THE BOOT...



BUT WHEN I CAME DOWN AT SUIPPE'S 'DROME, I NEARLY CRACKED UP. I SAW THE STARS AND STRIPES FLYING OVER 'OPERATIONS'...



...AND, AS I STEPPED FROM MY SPAD ONTO THAT TINY CHUNK OF THE GOOD OLD U.S., I GOT ALL CHOKED UP...

WELCOME TO THE 96TH AERO SQUADRON, UNITED STATES EXPEDITIONARY FORCES, LIEUTENANT! YOU LOOK SURPRISED! DIDN'T YOU KNOW WE LANDED IN EUROPE A WEEK AGO?

I...I GUESS I'VE BEEN AWAY, SER-GEANT... AWAY MUCH TOO LONG! BUT I'M HOME NOW!



THE END



Conducted
January 7, 1995



The Ace of ACES HIGH!

*An interview with the
legendary George Evans*

RINGGENBERG: *I know you and Al Williamson collaborated on one job that was in Valor. How did that come about?*

EVANS: I don't think it was meant to be that way, but Al and I were good friends for years and years. I would get these fifty-two page books to do on a tight deadline and often I would give a yell for Al to help. He would journey over from Brooklyn, into the wilds of New Jersey, and get himself a good case of hay fever and snuffle and snort a lot, but he'd help me out.

And when he would get an assignment he would do all the things that he liked to do (at that point)... the whole sword and sorcery bit.

(Feldstein)... They gave me a story involving some innocuous little guy who at heart was a murderer. Al would give you the story already done up with Leroy lettering and all the panels planned for size and placement. You didn't get much leeway.

When I brought the story in, they sat there looking it over... they sat there guffawing over what I had done. Al evidently had pictures in mind and mine went different from the way he saw it... but he loved it! Unlike Harvey, Al was delighted, with what others could do with the stories."

That approach (the story already done up with Leroy lettering and all the panels planned for size and placement) drove

Bernie Krigstein nuts, you know. Bernie would literally cut up the lettering then cut the paneling... to do it his own way.

But, gee, that was dedicating an enormous amount of time, so mostly I would just work with what they gave me.

Al would have all the copy down. We'd read it through. And if you asked him something, he'd say, "Well, this is what I thought... but, you're

doing the artwork." That was Al's attitude.

RINGGENBERG: *Do you recall doing a 3-D story called "The Planetoid" with Al Williamson?*

EVANS: I do, yes.

RINGGENBERG: *I spoke with Angelo Torres and he said that working with all the overlays on the 3-D stories was a real pain.*

EVANS: It was. It took patience... and I still wonder if it didn't destroy all our olfactory nerve endings for a bit because, boy, the

**MIKE FERRIS! WELL, I'M GOING TO WATCH
YOU BURN, MIKE FERRIS!**



But the pedestrian pictures, you know where somebody's just walking down the street with a row of tenement buildings or something, he disliked. Al hated to be confined to doing that sort of stuff, so he would send up an SOS, and I would help him out and do the pedestrian drawings.

RINGGENBERG: *You've always seemed to have a good handle on the civilian stuff... people in street clothes and natural settings too.*

EVANS: Thanks. Bill Gaines told me that was what initially charmed him and Al

stuff you worked with really stank. It had a sharp, piercing kind of ugly smell. I guess it was an acid of some kind to make the ink stick to the slick overlay stuff.

RINGGENBERG: *Was it hard to ink on the acetate?*

EVANS: How can I put it? Really hard! When the ink went on the acetate, it would sort of rise up in a little ridge instead of the line laying on the surface. And the ink destroyed the brushes very rapidly, so after a page or so your brush began to get logy and the lines less graceful. You had to switch to another brush and just write off the cost. We'd have all gone broke because of how rapidly it damaged our brushes. And you could not clean them up afterwards... they were completely destroyed.

RINGGENBERG: *On "The Planetoid" it looked like your inks over Al's pencils.*

EVANS: To a large degree, yes. There were areas, again, that he had no interest in. He would have loose sketches and I would tighten them up. I felt that I had full leeway. Al would say, "You want to do something else entirely, do it."

But, he was a damn good storyteller and a damn good artist even then... even as a youngster. I might re-pencil a little here, a little there in order to be able to ink from it... but largely, I stayed with what he had... I stayed with what he indicated as his storytelling progression and the layout of his panels.

RINGGENBERG: *Given Al's great handling of figures and your excellent inking, it's kind of a shame that you two didn't work on more than those two stories for EC.*

EVANS: It would have been nice: but we did do a hell of a lot of stuff together for Dell and Fawcett!

RINGGENBERG: *Was that concurrent with the EC stuff?*

EVANS: No, it would precede, at least our involvement in EC. Al went looking for work and wound up at EC partly because he got a big kick out of what they were doing... and he knew Wally Wood... and Joe Orlando... and maybe all of them.

RINGGENBERG: *When you were working for EC, did you have any other accounts? Was there anybody else you worked for?*

EVANS: Yes, I did. I never put all my eggs in one basket. I had been at Fiction House and they folded up late in the fall... around Christmas time. I worked for Ned Pines at Better Publications and they folded. I worked for Fawcett, and you know what happened so I began to search around for other accounts.

While I was doing comics I always tried to have several other things going, which kept me from doing all the work that any of them wanted me to do.

Fawcett would have, while they were successful, every new thing that came along. They would have a contest among the people on the staff and I wound up getting damn near every new thing that came along. I would ink and pencil everything. Then they would bring a new thing out and that's how come I guess Al and I worked together.

I worked with one of the early black artists... Al Hollingsworth. One of the nicest guys. Roy put him and me in touch and we did a lot together. And of course Jack Abel and a group including Rocco Mastrantonio helped me on Captain Video.

I kept a lot of accounts, including some halftone and two-color work for an aviation magazine called *Air Trails*. Unfortunately, they also folded.

Evans interview continued next issue!



PART IV

Interview by
S. C. Ringgenberg
Edited by
G. M. Carter